

# connecting compassion community & service

BY JEAN IVES



Recipients of the Massage Therapy Foundation's community service grants are testament to the fact that for every type of person who could benefit from massage, there's someone out there caring enough to provide it—if only there were a way. For many, since 1993, the Massage Therapy Foundation has provided that way.

The purpose of the foundation's community service grants is to make massage therapy accessible to groups of people who would otherwise not be able to receive it, and to promote working partnerships between the massage therapy profession and community-based organizations. The foundation awards three to five grants annually, ranging from \$500 to \$5,000.

"We specifically look for opportunities to share the benefits of massage with as many people as possible," says Foundation President Diana Thompson, LMP. "In addition to serving people who are sick or injured, neglected or abused, we want to touch the lives of health care providers, caregivers, social service workers and so

on. Our intention is to illustrate how healthy, informed touch impacts people who are suffering, in the hopes that massage becomes a treatment preference and not just an alternative option."

Applying for a grant takes more than a good idea and a couple of hours. The application is five pages long, and the guidelines, though well-written and easy to understand, are six pages. If an applicant is awarded a grant, the funding generally covers 12 months of programming. It may seem like a lot of work for a program that might last only a year. However, every recipient surveyed said the grant was well worth the effort. Some of the grant recipients have had to end their program when the funding ends; others have been fortunate enough to extend their good ideas far beyond the initial funding.

"Even though we are most known for our research granting, we believe very strongly in our community service efforts—after all, the spirit of massage is to help others," says Thompson. "Our goal is to tell their stories."



<< Rhonda Winner-Dodzweit, LMT, works with Trevor Tenhave, a participant in the grant program.

## pediatric massage therapy program

Johnson City, New York  
\$4,540 in 2003

**Rhonda Winner-Dodzweit, LMT**, recalls vividly the heartbreak of watching her brother, who suffered from spastic quadriplegia cerebral palsy. He died at age 10, more than 20 years ago.

“As a little girl, I remember seeing the muscles on his body so tight, and he appeared so uncomfortable in his own little body. Just breathing was a challenge for him,” Winner-Dodzweit says. “Back then there was no such program as massage for children with his needs.”

Thanks to a Massage Therapy Foundation Community Service Grant in 2003, Winner-Dodzweit was able to introduce such a program at the Handicapped Children’s Association in Johnson City, New York. The 12 children who benefited from the massage program were students with special needs who were attending an integrated preschool program.

The children also received speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and special education services. While observing students

and reviewing case-loads, the occupational therapists and physical therapists determined which children were most likely to benefit from massage therapy, and referred them. Most of the children referred had significantly tight muscles due to disability, many of them with cerebral palsy. Each child received a 30- to 45-minute massage session once a week for half the school year.

The parents were required to participate in three of their child’s therapy sessions. “They learned how





<< A senior retreat participant receives a chair massage by Amy Long, LMT, at a Weaver's Tale retreat in the surroundings of old growth forest at Alton Collins Retreat Center, Eagle Creek, Oregon.

she worked with as the activities director at a nursing home—people whose stories, she believed, also hadn't been told. Thus, Weaver's Tale Retreat Center came into being as a metaphor for blank pages on which seniors could capture their sensory experiences.

As a licensed massage therapist with a master's in occupational therapy, Seyl believed that seniors' lives could be greatly enhanced with intentional sensory stimulation. "I kept thinking, 'We've got to get these people outdoors!'" says Seyl.

Weaver's hosts its off-site seniors' retreats at the Alton Collins Retreat Center in Eagle Creek, Oregon, in the midst of an old growth rain forest typical of the Pacific Northwest. Ferns, trillium, elderberries and cedars are just a few of the natural surroundings that provide tactile, olfactory, auditory and visual stimuli. The day-long nature retreats have three components: 1) nature therapy, 2) music therapy, and 3) massage therapy. "Our primary purpose is providing an energy boost through sensory stimulation," says Seyl. "Depending on people's ability level, we might walk trails or we might just sit and look."

For instance, clients with Alzheimer's disease might experience the difference in color and texture of leaves, while clients who function at an independent retirement level might study old growth botany and learn the medicinal uses of plants.

Seniors receive a 15-minute chair massage, during which time they remain, at their request, in the same room with the rest of the group during music therapy. Seyl has a pool of about 25 massage therapists who

## weaver's tale retreat center

Portland, Oregon | [www.weavers-tale-retreat.org](http://www.weavers-tale-retreat.org)

Grants Awarded

\$4,640 in 2000

\$2,500 in 2001

\$4,920 in 2004 (Caregivers' Respite-related project)

**Edie Seyl founded** the Weaver's Tale Retreat Center in Portland, Oregon, in 1993. The name came, she says, from Chaucer's 14th century *Canterbury Tales*—or rather, from its missing chapter. Each chapter is based on the story of a different profession; there's the merchant's tale, the cook's tale and so on. Because Seyl was learning Navajo weaving at the time, she was distinctly aware that Chaucer's book included no weaver's tale. Seyl saw a parallel to the lives of the seniors

vie for the opportunity for participating in the retreats. “I send an e-mail out that we’re having a retreat on such-and-such date, and we sign up the first two massage therapists who reply.”

In addition to providing about two hours of massage, the therapists also act as companions to the seniors, help set up and take down the room and help load everyone back into the bus at the end of the day. “The massage therapists get paid \$75 for the day—not nearly what they’re worth, but they do it out of love,” says Seyl. Testament to the success of the retreats is a nearly 70 percent client return rate.

At Weaver’s Tale Retreat Center, seniors pay \$15 to \$20 for a day-long retreat. The actual cost, according to Seyl, is about \$75. Weaver’s has recently hired an office assistant who works four hours a week. Seyl performs the executive director, marketing, fundraising, budgeting, strategic planning and administrative functions, pays herself \$800 a month, and works 24 hours a week at a home health job to earn benefits and living expenses.

Weaver’s is unique to the Massage Therapy Foundation’s community grants program in that it has been awarded three grants. The first two were given in 2000 and 2001 and were used to incorporate massage into Weaver’s day-long nature retreats. An unprecedented third grant was awarded in 2004 for the purpose of expanding the program to caregivers of seniors.

Weaver’s respite retreats for caregivers are done differently than those for seniors. Rather than leading the program, Weaver’s participates in Multnomah County’s Aging and Social Services Department’s program. At a caregiver retreat, each massage therapist gives six to eight 30-minute chair massage sessions (25 minutes of massage with five minutes to transition) and receives \$100. They do not perform other staff chores, as they do at the seniors’ retreats. “Caregivers’ stress levels are off the charts,” says Seyl, referring to their 24/7 commitments to loved ones, with few breaks. At Weaver’s, they finally get a break.

Because Seyl kept meticulous records of Weaver’s program outcomes that were funded by Massage Therapy Foundation grants in 2000 and 2001, she was subsequently able to attract local funding. “I used the foundation’s funding to strengthen our program, so now we have documented results that help us convince others that we are worth investing in.” Weaver’s has received state or city grants from Portland General Electric, Northwest Natural Gas and two other local foundations. Most of Weaver’s funding comes from its fall fundraising, which is a silent and live auction that usually attracts about 150 faithful attendees.

Seyl is as committed to the continual effort of attracting funding as she is to her seniors. “I usually quit paying myself after August so we can be sure to have enough money to put on our annual fall fundraiser.”



to massage their child and learned all of the benefits for each particular child,” Winner-Dodzweit says. “The parents did well with the program and seemed to enjoy bonding more with their child with special needs.”

Winner-Dodzweit also taught the other therapists the benefits of massage for each child. “The occupational therapists and physical therapists were especially grateful for the massage program because of the significant impact that massage had on their goals for the child,” says Winner-Dodzweit. “For example, if a child had a movement-oriented goal it was easier for the child to obtain the goal after massage because of more relaxed muscles, improved body awareness, etc. Also, if the child had challenges with sensory integration, massage helped these children become more organized, centered and calm.”

She also says they saw the following areas improve: bonding with the caregiver; tolerance to touch and therapeutic handling by the other therapists; circulation for the children who weren’t able to move as independently; respiratory control; relaxation and overall decrease in stress levels; postural control; flexibility of movement; passive and active range of motion; eye contact and interactions; attention to task after a session; overall sensory regulation; and sleep/wake cycles.

Winner-Dodzweit completed the grant in June 2004 and gave birth to her son in July. Since that time, she has worked part-time as an occupational therapist, for which she also has a degree. “Now that [my son] is almost three, I think I’ll try to start the program up again. There’s definitely a strong need for massage therapy with the population of children I work with. Many children have received life-long emotional and physical benefits due to the program, and many thanks go to the Massage Therapy Foundation for allowing this to become possible.”



## victim healing program

Miami, Florida | [www.vscmiami.org](http://www.vscmiami.org)  
\$4,400 in 2002

<< (l-r) Massage therapists Maria Zacaris, Crystal Loiacano, Julie Miller and Heather Harvey provide massage to women at the Victim Services Center in Miami. They are hoping to receive more funding and donations to make the program year-long.

Most clients at the Victim Services Center (VSC) in Miami, Florida, have experienced trauma in some form: physical or psychological torture, sexual assault, aggravated assault, or as victims of human trafficking (sometimes called slavery). They all experience some degree of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Massage therapy has been employed here since the Massage Therapy Foundation's initial grant of \$4,400 in 2002, under the combined direction of Teresa Descilo, VSC director, and Wendy Mullens, LMT, formerly of Educating Hands School of Massage in Miami.

"We bill ourselves as a holistic practice for trauma," says Descilo. "While our mainstay service is a client-centered exposure treatment called Traumatic Incident Resolution, we use therapies such as massage, yoga and breath work to help 'unstick' some of people's traumatic memory that's stored in their body. Unconscious memory keeps preying on you, and the body doesn't know the difference between a mental image and an actual event." Some people are so overwrought and overwhelmed by their images that they can't talk about their trauma until some type of physical treatment brings their arousal level down."

Descilo adds that most of their clients are not from the United

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States, or they are from a socioeconomic class or culture that hasn't made massage available to them. "Massage therapy allows people to experience touch in a safe way... It gives them energy to talk about their trauma."

During the VSC intake process, psychotherapy always precedes massage. At some point in the process, the client's psychotherapist intern says, "We have massage available. Are you interested in learning about it?" Each client is invited to receive psychotherapy, yoga and four massages during the month-long program. Judge Jeri Cohen of Miami's Drug Dependency Court said in September 2006 that clients named the VSC as the most valuable service they received in their recovery.

Crystal Loiacano, an adjunct teacher at Educating Hands, has since taken over Wendy Mullen's role as massage therapist and consultant to VSC. Every Monday evening, Loiacano and three student volunteers (Maria Zacharias, Heather Harvey and Julie Miller) each give a one-hour massage to two clients. They try very hard to keep the same clients for four successive weeks.

"The victims are so grateful," says Loiacano. "Sometimes in the beginning of the process, we don't necessarily know what their trauma has been. It's not for us to explore that—they have psychotherapists who do that, Loiacano adds. She says some may be uptight in the beginning, and don't want their feet touched and don't want to undress. "But after they've received a massage they'll be more open the next time. Most of these women, and sometimes men, have never been touched in a positive way before."

Descilo wishes there were more time and resources for conducting research on the effectiveness of massage in the recovery of crime victims. "We have an awesome population for testing the effectiveness of massage. We have the clients, we have the set-up, we have the facilities ... they could just come in and do it. But we have nothing to spare in terms of our own time."

The Massage Therapy Foundation Community Service Grant expired in 2003, but massage continues to be an integral part of the VSC program thanks to continued funding from other sources, including the Violence Against Women Act fund and Miami Dade County.

For more information about the Massage Therapy Foundation and its community service grants, visit the foundation's website at [www.massagetherapyfoundation.org](http://www.massagetherapyfoundation.org) and click on the "Community Service" link.

## SOS wellness project

Hewitt, New Jersey | [www.strengthenoursisters.org](http://www.strengthenoursisters.org)  
\$4,230 in 2002

### Soothing the emotional & psychological wounds of abuse requires more than physical medicine.

Karin Westdyk runs the Strengthen Our Sisters (SOS) Wellness Project in Hewitt, New Jersey. The purpose of the 177-bed homeless shelter is to provide safe refuge for women and children fleeing domestic violence, and to develop model programs to assist clients in building essential life skills that will help them break the cycle of poverty, dependence and abuse that has dominated their lives.

“We’re seeking ways to improve attitudes and spirits—to help women get beyond where they are when they come in,” says Westdyk. Massage therapy is one of those ways.

The inclusion of massage therapy was funded in 2002 by a \$4,230 Massage Therapy Foundation grant written by Westdyk and massage therapist Alice Courage. The grant allowed the SOS shelter to hire a massage therapist one day a week. Westdyk credits massage as one of the tools that helps the clients relax. “Anything you’re doing, you’re much more optimally focused if you’re relaxed,” she says.

Mental and physical relaxation is an experience that not many SOS clients have known in their lives. The distinction between violent touch and good touch is essential to them.

“Some of the women were resistant [to the idea of massage] at first, some were enthusiastic and some were fearful,” says Westdyk. She adds that many of the women who arrive at the shelter are addicted to

the drugs prescribed to them after hospital emergency room visits following domestic physical abuse.

“When someone’s crying or hysterical, they [the staff in emergency rooms] tend to say ‘give them a pill.’ Hysteria isn’t the problem; abuse is the problem. Finding ways to help people relax without the use of drugs is important,” she says.

Soothing the emotional and psychological wounds of abuse requires more than physical medicine. Westdyk invites speakers to talk with the women about the interdependence of physical, emotional and mental wellness.

“When one area of a person’s life is not healthy, it’s like a loose stitch,” she says. “Our guest speakers talk about nutrition, natural medicine and massage. Every chance we get, we look for holistic ways to help our women. We’ve had several massage therapists talk with our clients and educate them about how massage can help them relax.”

When the Massage Therapy Foundation Community Service Grant ended after one year, a chiropractor volunteered his time for a while, and a volunteer reiki therapist still sometimes comes to work with the women.

“The massage program ended when the grant ran out, because operating expenses have to be met first, like electricity and the mortgage,” says Westdyk. “Many times the staff isn’t paid on time because we have to pay our bills first.”