

Staying afloat

In the 21st century work is playing a more dominant role in many people's lives than ever before. As a consequence we have less time to relax and keep fit, both of which are essential to our well-being. One Island woman believes she has found the perfect way to combine the two — through swimming. Nick Yates reports

Sian Griffiths runs a swimming school called Brainwaves from an indoor pool in Union Mills. She uses a swimming technique called the Shaw Method to promote stress release and relaxation. She says that even the most unsporty types can learn to relax and unwind after a stressful meeting or day at work by using her teachings.

She says: 'I regularly observe people "relax", just by the act of being in the water. The benefits of swimming can be observed in a variety of areas of life other than just a way of getting fit. These include reducing stress, changing an individual's perception of themselves and how they manage their lives. In turn, this can promote a sense of well-being, which enables individuals to develop an overall greater self-confidence and contribute to them achieving life-fulfilment and a better "work-life" balance.'

It may seem like a bit of a leap of logic to suggest that stepping into a pool can fix your life, but Ms Griffiths sees learning to swim correctly as a real catalyst for change. She says it is less about sport, or competition and more about relaxation.

The Shaw Method was developed by Steven Shaw, derived from the Alexander Technique which concentrates on body awareness and the alignment of the head, neck and back when active.

Ms Griffiths says: 'Swimming can act as one of the strings within an individual's bow, providing a stress reducing strategy that enables each person to create an oasis of calm and experience "flow". This state of flow enables an individual's problems and concerns to float away, allowing them to lose sense of time and enjoy the experience of water.'

She encourages swimmers to think actively and creatively about what they are doing, rather than responding automatically. She says this allows students to challenge existing thoughts and beliefs about swimming. Using techniques that achieve

efficient body use, helps to release muscle tension and create psychological change.

You may be thinking, it's all very well learning to swim correctly but how could that increase my self-confidence?

Ms Griffiths and her partner Stuart Alexander have collected a lot of research done by large organisation to prove the benefit of health promotion programmes. A study by Vielif, sponsored by Standard Life Healthcare, Philips and Unilever found that a return on investment of 373 per cent could be expected from investing in health programmes for employees.

The study targeted a group of employees with a 12-month health promotion programme including health assessments and personalised behaviour change sessions. The study showed a reduction in ineffective working time from 24.6 per cent to 18.2 per cent — a saving of £560 per employee a year.

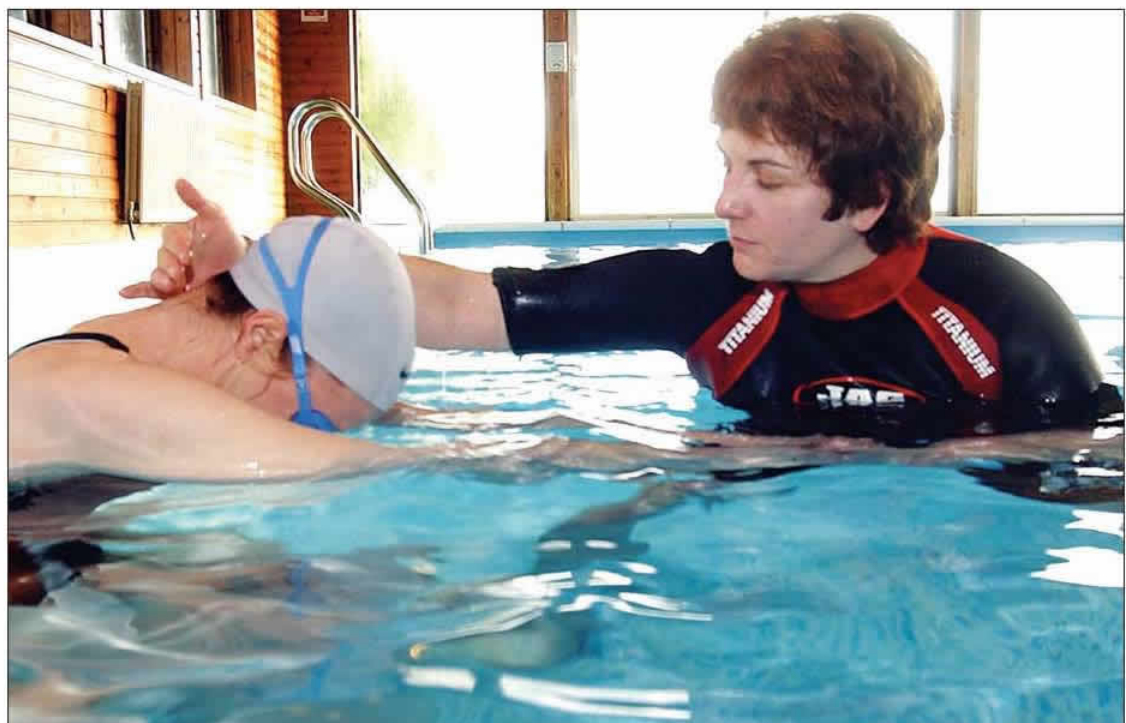
Ms Griffiths says she is targeting organisations in the Island with her teachings, because it is so accessible. She says that businesses can benefit by making time for their employees to enjoy a relaxing form of exercise, increasing the self-esteem of the workforce.

She adds: 'Humans may be designed for "fight or flight", but due to the work the majority of people do, there is nowhere to release our pent up anxieties. Exercise allows an individual to release negative tension, frustration and anger.'

'Learning the ability to work with the water and not be in contest with it, in my view, is totally different to any other form of exercise.'

Brainwaves' maxim is 'the intelligent way to swim' and it suggests that swimming can help break the spiral of stress and confront the problems of personal development.

She concludes: 'Swimming should allow people time for themselves to reflect. People need to take the time to consider — "what is it all for", "for whom am I doing it" and above all "why am I doing it". Perhaps these questions really are at the heart of success and potentially begin the process of change for an individual, should they choose to.'



UNWINDING: Sian Griffiths, right, teaching Christine Lucas the principles of the Shaw Method

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