

Career Switch

... from food technologist to dance movement therapist

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As a food technologist, Juliette Kirkwood would begin her working day with a coffee in the laboratory reviewing her 'to-do' list. Her job involved developing products such as bread, snack foods and sauces, taking them from concept stage to factory trials.



See her start work these days and you'll find her moving to music, attuning herself physically and emotionally for a day's work as a dance movement therapist.

"Since I was 12 I've used dance therapeutically," says Kirkwood. "It's always been my outlet. I didn't know you could study it and make a profession of it." Until she met a dance therapy student at one of the many dance and movement workshops she's attended over the years. "When I learnt what she was doing, I just knew that's what I wanted to do."

Afraid that she wouldn't be able to adjust financially to student life after earning good money, she delayed her new career move for several years. "My husband really encouraged me to do it and not to worry about the money. I couldn't have done it without his support," says Kirkwood.

After 11 years in the food technology profession, she left to have a baby. It was a timely 'out.' Instead of returning to work following maternity leave

Kirkwood signed up in 2002 for a Graduate Diploma in Dance Therapy at the Wesley Institute for Ministry and the Arts. "We had to pay for childcare when I studied, so it was a financially draining time on the family. But we managed."

Kirkwood describes the time between leaving her job and starting the course as excruciatingly painful. "I had no job, no career and becoming a mum for the first time was a huge transition. I felt I had no control over my life, with the baby dictating everything I did. I didn't cope well and developed post-natal depression." Going back to study gave her new direction and focus.

It was no ordinary course. "It's experiential learning, not just intellectual, which was extremely challenging," says Kirkwood. "The course involves lots of movement, which can dislodge emotional issues. It shook my foundations, bringing up all my 'stuff'. We were warned that this could happen and were offered therapy as part of the course."

Since graduating Kirkwood has worked with people experiencing depression, (including post natal depression), sexual abuse, schizophrenia, eating disorders, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, as well as 'normal' people searching for a higher quality of life. As a mother of two Kirkwood now works part time as a lecturer at the Wesley Institute, runs her private Spirit Dance workshops and sees people one-to-one as a primary therapist.

You don't have to know how to dance to benefit from dance movement therapy, according to Kirkwood, but you do have to be willing to move. So what actually happens in a session? The client usually fronts up with an issue he or she wants to work on, which is briefly discussed then followed by some creative movement with or without music. Kirkwood then facilitates the client's understanding of what her client's body is communicating about the issue. "The body doesn't lie and the way we move reflects the way we think, so the information presented by the body's movement is always succinct. It really helps people get clarity and resolve issues quickly."

The biggest professional perk of making the switch has been to do with life purpose and meaning. "I cannot begin to describe how much richer my life is now," says Kirkwood. "As a food technologist, I was always unhappy, changing jobs every two years,

hoping to find fulfilment,” she recalls. “But I never did because my personal values weren’t aligned with the ethics of food companies. So there was no way I could pour my life energy into my profession, which you needed to, in order to be successful. Now I feel like I’m contributing to the evolution of humanity. To know I’m part of that process is extremely rewarding and meaningful and I’m now happy to pour my heart and soul into my work.”



Kirkwood has no regrets about the time she spent as a food technologist. “The scientist and the artist now work together inside my head to bring about the best possible result for my clients.”

“As a scientist, I had a well developed left brain and spent a lot of my time doing left-brain activities, such as dissecting and analysing,” explains Kirkwood. “Training to become a dance movement therapist really developed the right side of my brain, which is more about intuition, expanding and integrating than deconstructing. By the time I graduated I felt like I had a well-developed and balanced brain.”

Personal benefits continue to flow from her professional training. Says Kirkwood, “I feel more whole and much better equipped to deal with whatever life throws at me. I now have so much more wisdom, strength and understanding to draw upon.”

Ed.Note: Paragraph 6 did not appear in the article published in the Sydney Morning Herald but was a part of the original written piece on Juliette, written by Thea, and we considered it important to include it here.

Thank you Thea O’Connor and the Sydney Morning Herald for allowing us to reprint this article.