

A Polish experience

A trip to an international conference was the beginning of an unexpected adventure in taking acupuncture to Poland. **Anne Marshall** explains

Our Polish experience began when a delegation from Drugs and Homeless Initiative (DHI) attended last year's International Conference on Harm Reduction in Warsaw.

Two of the workers, Trish Thompson and Mick Webb, decided to travel on and see a bit more of Poland, and they began by accepting an invitation from Grzegorz Wodowski to visit the Monar Project that he directs in Krakow. They were immediately impressed by workers at the project, who have to cope with lack of funding and very limited resources.

Both Trish and Mick are trained in Stage I (detox points) and Stage II (hepatitis C) auricular acupuncture and are assistant trainers for Acudetox Plus UK, as well as working at DHI. Fortunately, they had the foresight to take some ear acupuncture needles and equipment with them to Poland, so while they were in Krakow they offered some sessions of ear acupuncture to staff and clients. The response was overwhelming. This treatment was unheard of in Poland, so it was enthusiastically received and very much appreciated.

When they returned to Bristol elated by the response in Poland, Trish and Mick were determined to bring back ear acupuncture to the country. So when the next steering group (which regulates Acudetox Plus) met, we discussed the possibility of going to Poland to train some workers. All were in agreement on the plan and Acudetox pledged to finance the project if no funding could be raised in Poland.

In the meantime, Trish and Mick returned to Krakow last August for a holiday and did two drop-ins, where they treated more than 40 people. Grzegorz took on the mammoth task of sorting out training rooms and recruiting people from all over Poland to do the training. Back home, we at Acudetox had a lot of preparation to do, including getting our training manual translated into Polish by Zaneta, who is originally from the Monar Project but is now working for DHI in Swindon.

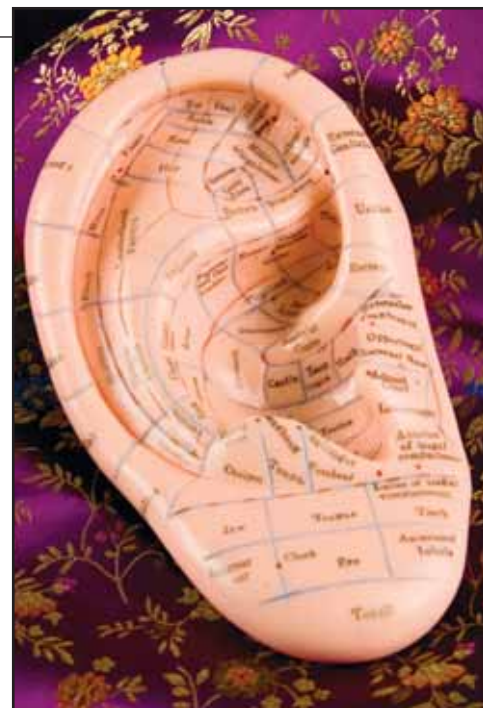
After months of preparation, Trish, Mick and I flew to Krakow. We were met by Grzegorz and felt immediately at home. He arranged for us to stay in an apartment in the old Jewish quarter of Krakow, Kazimierz. Training started the next day. There were 21 students from various cities in Poland – Krakow, Warsaw, Lodz, Szczecin, Torun, Wroclaw and Bielsko-Biala. Their eagerness and diligence amazed us –

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they were so keen to learn what we were offering. The atmosphere was happy, friendly and relaxed as they practised their needle technique to perfection and soaked up every bit of information we gave them. When asked to pair up to needle certain points, they did this quickly and well, and then went on to practise on several more people.

The practical sessions were great fun. The fact that Trish and Mick didn't speak Polish didn't seem to matter – they knew a few words, including the names of all the ear points. There was always someone in the group who could speak English and quite a few of the students understood English and enjoyed having the training in both languages.

The training finished on Friday, and everyone passed with flying colours. Their excitement and gratitude was overwhelming. Fortunately, we had taken a generous supply of needles and sharps bins and were able to give everyone a box of needles and every agency one or two bins. We also let everyone keep their rubber ears (used for practising needle technique) as a souvenir of the training. Many friendships were made among the students, as well as with us.



Our Polish experience was quite moving and emotional for us, as well as being interesting. We felt very privileged to be able to introduce ear acupuncture to drug workers in Poland, where it was so eagerly and gratefully received. The feedback from the students was so positive and encouraging; we have every confidence that the skills learnt from our training will very quickly be implemented and that numerous clients will benefit from the treatment.

We're planning to return in a year to do reassessments and to train some more workers and suitable service users. We hope that this is just the beginning of our Polish experience.

Anne Marshall is trainer for Acudetox Plus UK, which was set up in 2003 to provide training in ear acupuncture in the southwest. It goes much further afield and has recently become part of the CAAAD (Community Action Around Alcohol and Drugs) Project in Bristol.

The team now offers Stage I (detox points) and Stage II training. For details of forthcoming courses, email them at acudetoxplus@hotmail.com or call them at the CAAAD Project, on 0117 904 2297.