

Case Study: Aromatherapist - Louise

What do you do?

I offer advice and treatment to clients at home (I've got my own practice) who seek help for various conditions, for example, stress-related conditions, different skin conditions, problems with arthritic pain and rheumatoid arthritis.

I perform body massage and provide part- or full treatments using essential oils.

I also work part-time for an organisation that provides essential oils and aromatherapy-related products, as well as being a training school for aromatherapists.



What is your background?

I used to work for British Telecom - so something completely different to what I do now!

Then, I moved abroad to live, and when I came back, I started to suffer from anxiety and panic attacks. I tried to get help from my doctor but he couldn't offer me anything apart from pills and tranquillisers.

So, I sought help from an aromatherapist and it was the only thing that worked. When I felt better, I wanted to help other people and decided to get on a training course in aromatherapy at the company where I work part-time now.

The company is accredited by the International Society of Professional Aromatherapists (ISPA). I found that this was important - lots of people do non-accredited courses and then find they're not really at the standard they should be.

I had to do an ITEC (International Therapy Examination Council) anatomy and physiology exam as well.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

You need to be very patient and friendly at all times; you need to be very sensitive to the people that you're treating - some of them can be quite ill.

You need to be aware of confidentiality and not give information about clients to other people because they come to you in confidence.

You have to be good at counselling, because in consultations you might talk about areas such as depression and anxiety, so you'll benefit from having some counselling skills.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

I think it would be good to go into reflexology as well; various aspects of aromatherapy use the different reflex points of the feet, so aromatherapy and reflexology often go hand in hand.

You find that aromatherapists become reflexologists as well, having a double opportunity for finding work.

Lots of aromatherapists go into sports injury massage; this is remedial massage, working with various sports injuries.

Lots of aromatherapists go into nutritional therapy; this is something we touch on in our training course. Lots of the advice we give to people is about how to have a healthy lifestyle.

What changes will there be in the future?

I hope that aromatherapy will be used more in the NHS, maybe complementing the work of GPs for treating stress-related conditions, etc, and that the NHS will become more open to using aromatherapists to treat patients in that area.

I'd like to see stricter guidelines on aromatherapists who practise because a lot of aromatherapists don't belong to a professional body and probably haven't received the correct training.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

I find that giving full-body massages can be quite tiring, so I try to structure my day so that I'm maybe doing a massage in the morning and then going out to give a talk in the afternoon. I'll take time out to do some mixing of my oils and preparing creams for various people.

Also, I teach aromatherapy, which is quite challenging and gets me involved with students.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

It's quite easy now because aromatherapy is an area where you can open your own business, so you can work from home, which I do for half of the week. This means you can fit work around children; I've got two children, so I can fit treatments around getting baby-sitters for them.

Also, I work in a college, teaching aromatherapy, so that's another area you can move forward into. I work for a complementary medicine supplier, another area of work.

This is a growth industry but you must make sure you have the correct training and be the best you can at actually getting the business.

What do you like about your job?

I like meeting and helping new people. I also teach aromatherapy, so I love passing on information about its benefits and also the benefits of essential oils.

I really enjoy the mixing and preparation of my oils, creams and lotions.

What do you dislike about your job?

I dislike always have to defend aromatherapy and its benefits to people, specifically because lots of people have never even tried it. Very often, you're up against the beliefs of doctors; trying to get them to change their minds is a constant battle.

Also, one aspect that I sometimes find worrying is the area of personal safety when I'm working alone at home.

What are your ambitions?

To teach and pass on the benefits of aromatherapy to students. I've just done a teacher training course in adult education and I hope to go further along this line.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

Before you embark on any course, check with ISPA (International Society of Professional Aromatherapists) and IFA (International Federation of Aromatherapists) that the course you're going onto is an accredited course, because there are a lot of courses out there, and you need to be sure that your course is up to standard.

Also, it's a good idea if you have quite a bit of knowledge of biology because we look at anatomy and physiology on the course, and also chemistry because we have to look at various chemical components of essential oils to enable us to understand how the essential oils work.

A day in the life

9:30 am - 10:00 am

Having a consultation with the mother of a baby with infantile eczema. Giving advice and a preparation of cream.

10:15 am - 12:30 pm

Giving a consultation and full body massage to a new client who suffers from stress-related conditions.

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm

Giving a talk to a mother and baby group about baby massage. Talking about and selling products.

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Giving a back and neck massage to a lady who suffers from migraine.