

BabyGym at a Children's Home

By Elma Vertue

During my 5 week practical to qualify as a BabyGym-instructor, I worked at an Adoption Home near Westcliff, Johannesburg.

I was assigned 3 little girls of different ages, of which Maria was one. Maria was 6 months old when I started with BabyGym. Maria preferred lying on her tummy and was very able to turn over from her back – so massaging was a challenge at first. She did not like the touch on her skin and kept trying to get away from it. With enough repetition however, she eventually relaxed and allowed me to massage her as long as I wished.

I noticed early on that her hands were closed tightly all the time and it took a while before they relaxed enough for me to open them. By week 3 she could actually hold on to a toy! Then I noticed that her little pointy tongue was almost constantly out and training to take food from a teaspoon and actually keeping it inside the mouth was a frustrating job for the caregivers! By stimulating the mouth, massaging the cheekbones and jaw line, the upper lip and coccyx and chin and bellybutton and repeating the relaxing massage – especially over the facial area, her tongue became less protruding.

While working on her legs, I was deeply concerned about both her legs being permanently turned in from the knees down at almost 90degrees! With that, the feet and toes were curled up and tightly squeezed. Her calf muscles were so hard I hardly made an impression on them for the first week, after which I could feel a slight improvement. With much repetition of all the exercises from Week 1 – Week 5, I am happy to report that her left leg has started turning out on its own and I am sure the right leg will follow suit shortly! She even sits on my lap, facing me and is able to open up the legs and hang them down to the sides, which was not possible before.

Maria has benefitted from the Vestibular System exercises and was very close to sitting on her own by Week 5. She now makes eye-contact and beams when we sing and dance.

Although my five weeks are up, I will continue to visit and play with Maria and her other two little friends, who found their way straight into the middle of my heart! They need so little to develop so much – how can we not continue to love and help the less fortunate!

There are almost 50 babies in this Adoption Home at any one time, from birth to approximately 18 months, who are all waiting to be adopted by loving families. Touch, love and communication are not high on the list of priorities in a home like this, as there are just not enough hands to go around! I trust that I will be given the time to touch,

love and communicate with each of these babies through BabyGym, before they go home to their new mummies and daddies.

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