

Bangor Township woman helps others through holistic therapy

Posted by [Amy Jo Johnson | The Bay City Times](#) July 29, 2008 10:02AM

Categories: [Health and Science](#), [Top Feature](#)



Cathy Layman | Times

PhotoAbove and right: Suellen Bartel treats Dana Campbell using the Anat Baniel Method, which involves relaxing the muscles, being aware of the skeleton as the body's frame, and getting back to moving the body the way it was meant to move.



Suellen Bartel was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at age 16.

For almost 25 years she battled the debilitating condition with medications, diets and treatments. She had surgery to replace her wrist, her ankle, her knee and to fuse several discs in her spine. She even traveled as far as Mexico for treatment, which offered some relief.

But she still wasn't seeing enough improvement.

"I was really always looking for a solution," she said. "I had arthritis pretty much from my jaw to my toes. I was just so swollen I could hardly move."

Bartel said the arthritis particularly affected many of the joints on her right side, leaving her young body looking as though she was recovering from a stroke.

Even so, Bartel tried to ignore the pain and just get past it. The Bangor Township woman said she instead directed her efforts toward helping others through her career in social work.

In 2001, Bartel finally found relief through the help of a Saginaw physical therapist, who was also a Feldenkrais practitioner.

The therapist used the teachings of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, a physicist who pioneered a learning system in the 1940s that utilized movement and awareness of self to bring about changes in mind and body.

Bartel, who used to get around with the help of a motorized scooter and now walks without any aid, says she could not believe the results.

"I just kept getting better," said Bartel, 49.

In 2003, Bartel decided to delve further into the theory of connecting brain and body.

She took instruction based on the Feldenkrais Method and the Anat Baniel Method. Baniel, once a student of Feldenkrais in Israel, has expanded on her mentor's techniques and developed her own practice now based in California.

Today, after more than 31/2 years of study, Bartel works with clients in the areas of Midland, Au Gres, Bay City and Frankenmuth.

She's treated people of all ages, from toddlers to the elderly, and believes this method of awareness through movement has benefits for any individual - from children suffering from cerebral palsy and multiple sclerosis to adults dealing with such ailments as fibromyalgia and stroke.

Even a singer who simply wants to learn how to breathe better or someone who wants to improve their posture could benefit from this, Bartel said.

"Everyone would benefit from this work," she said. "I've come so far. You wouldn't even know I'm the same person. I feel like I got my life back by doing this work."

The holistic type of physical therapy varies in duration from person to person and the type of condition being treated. Some folks may see results in a six-week course, while others may need to repeat sessions for years.

"Every person is different," Bartel said. "It's not a cookie-cutter answer for each person."

Some folks are skeptical, Bartel said, because the treatment is not part of traditional medicine and is not covered by medical insurance. And while traditional medical treatment works in many areas, Bartel says she believes there is room for people to use and appreciate the benefits of both.

Dena Campbell, 45, of Bay City, said she's a believer.

Campbell, who has suffered pain from degenerative spine and disc disease, said she started seeing Bartel in January and has found great relief. She goes for treatment once a week.

"I can sleep better. I can walk better. I got my stride back," she said.

Campbell says she feels like she walks taller now and has noticed that she no longer has to pull herself up from a sitting position.

"I'm not on any pain medications. I don't have the pain that I used to have," she said.

Campbell said she's found she can use her mind to get past pain and to move in a more efficient and effective way.

Would she recommend the therapy to others?

"Definitely, in fact I have," she said.

Cheryl Burke, 69, of Auburn, said she'd absolutely recommend the method as well.

Burke, who has been getting treatment for about 2 1/2 years, said she used to suffer from neck pain and limited mobility.

"I was afraid I was going to lose my driver's license," she said.

A retired nurse practitioner, Burke said she tried traditional medicine but found muscle relaxers and pain relievers weren't the answer for her.

"I really enjoy life. I don't want to be zoned out," she said.

Burke said she's found great relief in the Anat Baniel Method.

"It's awaking the brain," she said. "It's really hard to explain (it). It's one of those things that when somebody asks you, you say you really have to experience it."

Lessons are not centered on making the body do certain movements but creating a connection where the brain helps the body reset to make the movements on its own.

"It's about connections and using your whole self," Bartel said. "You're reorganizing how you use the body through the brain."

Bartel said she hopes to one day open a children's center and to continue her work on a broader scale.