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Running A Business - Counselling Practice

Jenny Quine achieved a lifelong dream when she opened up her counselling practice in France. Clay Iles finds out more

Jenny Quine needs no prompting to evoke scenes of her childhood. So vivid are her early memories of France that she always longed to live there. A psychotherapist, at 63 she has finally settled in Collonges-la-Rouge in the south west, where she runs The Alive Centre.

Jenny started her practice in Surrey 30 years ago. Counselling was in its infancy then and she began with a few individual clients. These developed into evening groups and workshops. The lure of France, however, nagged away. She began to commute and ran regular workshops in Collonges-la-Rouge, where she had visited as a child. Groups of people from England made regular trips to her in this little gem of a village where they explored the benefits of meditation and self-development.

'My love of France came from my father,' Jenny explains. 'A confirmed Francophile, going there always brought out the best in him. He died in France, when he'd gone over to celebrate the 6th June Normandy landings.

'This area where I live, near Brive, affected me most. I remember coming here with mum and dad - an intense déjà vu experience. I felt I'd actually lived in this town.'

The serious prospect of settling in Collonges-la-Rouge for good arose when her 89 year old mother was dying.

'She asked me what I wanted to do with my inheritance,' Jenny says. 'I didn't hesitate. My dream had never left me. "Buy my own property in France," I answered. "I'd love to set up The Alive Centre there."

Within a few days Jenny's daughter and business partner, Kate, spotted a property for sale near where she ran her workshops. It had the same spellbinding view over Collonges-la-Rouge. Jenny's mother died a week later and Jenny bought her new home, Couzedoux, a picturesque manor with a huge barn, a gîte with two terraces and a floodlit swimming pool.

Spiritual Element

'When I moved in,' Jenny says. 'I kept repeating, "I've got here... At last I've got here ..." It's such a special place for me. There's a strong spiritual element. It's mystical. The sunrises, sunsets, moon and stars take my breath away. I love the stillness, the richness that comes from the red earth, the buildings and the medieval villages nearby. I feel I've stepped back in time. It's perfect for the work I do. Kate and I are always available for individual consultations and we run six weekly workshops a year. Not that everybody here comes for counselling and advice. Outside those six weeks, people stay in our gîte or barn just for a holiday.'

Psychotherapy and counselling are not yet as popular in France as in England. 'French people are really quite intellectual. They don't turn to others with their problems as we do in England,' Jenny says. 'The British have followed trends in America. In France there's still rather a stigma. They're so proud and don't open themselves as much. There's the attitude that if you need to see a therapist you must be psychologically damaged. That is now slowly changing but most of my clients come from England.'

Jenny strongly believes that people who help others with their problems should also receive some form of counselling themselves. 'It's irresponsible if you don't.' She regularly visits her own counsellor in Brive. 'You have such influence over other people. Many of them depend on you. Seeing another counsellor helps keep everything in perspective.'

Kate has also played a crucial role. At 30 years old and a fitness and dance instructor as well as a qualified psychotherapist, she ensures the focus on meditation and self development doesn't lapse solely into the sedentary. Many of the courses feature an hour's light physical warm up before the day's work 'Body and mind sums up Kate', Jenny says. 'Okay, she's my daughter, but she inspires people and has many talents. Kate is slim, with so much energy and a fantastic dancer. She's the perfect foil to my more measured approach.'

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Jenny didn't find it easy settling by herself in France. She has always been able to speak and understand some French, but she was by no means fluent. Now she almost is. 'As a single woman,' Jenny says, 'I was vulnerable. They don't expect a woman, alone in a small French village, to take control of her life, particularly in practical matters. When I arrived I admit I was pretty gullible. It's only now after three years I can open my eyes and think, "God, the roof over the barn needs fixing," and know what to do. And there are all the rules and regulations. You have to know all about them. On the other hand my neighbours have been fantastic. Their warmth and generosity have always lifted my spirits.'

Kate's little boy Louis, five and a half, gives Jenny and his mother an insight into French life they might otherwise have missed – education. 'It's an eye opener,' Jenny says. 'You feel it's a privilege for children to go to school here. Louis had his first day of school in France, not knowing a word of French. It must have been difficult for him. He was immediately accepted. Now he's fluent in French. School life is structured with plenty of rules. The children obey them. The purity of it all here, manners, family values, people helping each other – it's so different from England. Safer too. Brive has 60,000 people and scarcely any violence. You can walk the streets at night with no danger from drunken louts on the corners. Not like Horsham, where I come from, and that's hardly a crime hotspot.'

Jenny often refers to her friends, relatives and clients as living in a good place within themselves and their struggle to get there. Her place is indisputably good. Couzedoux is uncommercialised and untouched. It provides the perfect harmonious backdrop to the calming influence of The Alive Centre. Jenny's earliest memories were of journeys. A recurring one is sitting in the backseat of an Austin 7 with her teddy bear, as she travelled with her parents through villages gutted by the Germans. 'I want to get through to the French more,' Jenny says. 'I've been drawn to them all my life. It's time to give something back. I'd like to see French people and loads of British enjoy the atmosphere of Couzedoux together, getting the benefit from The Alive Centre. Then I'll know I've arrived.'

Jenny's tips for moving to France

- Make sure you can make yourself understood in French. If you can't, take French lessons or do a crash course before leaving UK.
- Read *Living and Working in France* by David Hampshire, published by Survival Books Ltd. This book is a must and covers all practical details you should know in order to buy a property in France.
- Join a choir! The French love choirs and if you live in a village it's an ideal way to integrate with the local people.
- Watch French television. British TV won't help you at all.
- French people are polite, especially in villages. When you go into a shop or bar always say *bonjour* and *au revoir* – otherwise people might think you're rude!
- Get your *carte vitale* as soon as you arrive in France. This is your residents' medical card and covers 75 per cent of your medical treatment.
- Make sure you enjoy every day. France is a sensual delight!

Business Advice

- Know the market. The British are open to counselling; the French are not so willing. If you are offering a service aimed more at British clientele, ensure the expat community is large enough in your chosen area.
- When buying a property don't necessarily expect truthful answers to important questions – e.g. plans for other buildings in the area. The *mairie* will give you accurate information.
- Above all don't sign anything you don't understand, or only think you understand. You must be certain. Take a translator if your French is weak.
- Think of renting a property for a year before taking the final leap. Make sure you experience a winter in France. You are not going on holiday.

The Alive Centre

Couzedoux

19500 Collonges-la-Rouge

Tel: 00 33 (0)5 55 25 36 19

jenny@aliveprogramme.com

www.aliveprogramme.com

Six 7-day residential programmes in April, May, October and December. These include meditation, exercise, self development, dance and guided walks. From £450-£599 per week, full board.

Jenny and Kate are available for private counselling and psychotherapy consultations.

For just a holiday the Barn and Gîte are available to rent throughout the year.

The barn: £700-£850 per week

The gîte: £375-£500 per week

GETTING THERE

Fly to Limoges with Flybe and Ryanair. From Limoges, take the train to Brive-la-Gaillarde (approx one hour)

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