

Montessori Methods in May with Marlena

How do our Certified PAC Team incorporate Positive Approach[™] to Care Skills into other methods and systems?

by Amanda Bulgarelli



May is a month of finding moments of joy with your mothers, families, and feeling at **home** no matter where you are. After the winter months and signs of early spring, May brings a brightness and warmth to the inside and outside of our homes. When we take a moment to look at the beautiful blooms on those May flowers, it is important to notice ALL of the many colors and types of flowers that make a garden beautiful. At Positive Approach[™] to Care, we know that there are many methodologies and ideas out there that have lovely attributes to offer, adding beauty to the garden of dementia care. One of our Certified Trainers has found a way to see the many colors around the globe related to dementia care and skills. Marlena Myers attended our London Trainer Certification course last summer and is now working to train

as many interested people in Poland as she can in Teepa's methods and ideas alongside her other valued programs. Marlena loves sharing about the GEMS[™] with families and Care Partners to help them see the shining aspects of each individual along the progression of dementia. Below she discusses how this integration of PAC into her work with Little Brothers and Montessori in Poland has taken her to all new heights of success and beauty.

Helping others to feel at home in their own lives, as so much changes is tough. By seeing our loved ones as GEMS[™] we can allow for more comfort and care. Marlena says;

*There is a Polish branch of Little Brothers, based in Warsaw, who lead a project called **Alzheimer's Stop**. They have been creating groups of dementia education leaders who then offer support in different locations in the town. I am part of this project sharing Positive Approach[™] to Care methods and the GEMS[™]. In two weeks I am to do a workshop on the Montessori Approach in Dementia Care. I always share with the attendees that they can use any method that works, to positively change the life of people living with dementia, but your foundation, the thing you must start with, is the knowledge of dementia and the PAC program in particular.*

Feeling at **home** can mean many things, but as we age, we feel the importance of the support from our mothers. No one can love and support you while growing your independence and skills quite like a mother can. Montessori offers many opportunities to succeed independently, but with PAC Skills, we can support those living with

dementia with the same level of care and support that a mother would offer. Marlena shares;

Montessori is fantastic as it gives us so much information on how to prepare the environment to make someone more independent. They deliver information about excessive disability, which is important, what material can we use, how to isolate the difficulties and that it is about the process of doing, not making. But before you engage a person in an activity – especially those in late dementia – you have to make a contact, help them understand what you want from them or what they are to do with this item/material. From my perspective, Teepa's philosophy and the program itself already incorporates many pieces that flow nicely with Montessori.

*After working with those living with dementia using the Montessori method, I have found that Montessori alone is not enough. Care partners also have to be aware of some changes to expect with each stage as dementia progresses along with the retained abilities. PAC teaches vision changes, language changes, and many other parts of the brain that change without just focusing on memory changes. With some knowledge around the whole brain changes with dementia, Care Partners can experience the **Ah-ha!** effect that can help them truly modify their approach.*

*What I can share about Montessori as a Montessori teacher **and** PAC Trainer is that how you prepare the materials you want to use for certain activities is important for Montessori and helps set you up for success with PAC. Some of the Montessori methods that I have found extremely useful are that you present all items on a tray to let the person living with dementia better isolate the space, organize everything from left to right, and focus on how you create and present the material to best use eye-hand coordination. When I match these steps with PPA™ and HuH™, the results speak for themselves!*

Marlena has a few short stories of success with her combination of Montessori and PAC Training combined;

One man that I work with was diagnosed with Lewy Body Dementia a few months ago after being treated for Alzheimers for 4 years. Movement and verbal interaction are very limited, and many have just given up citing that he can't do much anymore. Wrong! When I approach him from the front, give him time to see me, and gain eye contact each time, he has truly opened up to me and sometimes he even manages to articulate, "Good-bye!" We WORK using Hand-under-Hand™ to do what he loves, like sanding wood, tearing paper, attaching PVC pipes, tightening and loosening nuts and bolts, etc... Even though his eyes gaze somewhere else, through touch we are connected and he is happy.

Verbal communication is often lost with dementia, and today we had a Money Day. I brought coins and embossed credit cards and was using verbal cues matched with visual cues. I slowly introduced that, "money is important, money was important in your life, and I know you were responsible for your employees..." at this point, with all the money on the table and talk of importance

and responsibility, one of the gentlemen that I work with started talking and he talked for a long while. Even though we couldn't understand the words, by making a connection for him he felt comforted enough to speak!

On Monday I worked with a beautiful shining Ruby, so I thought. The material I provided was plastic valves and PVC pipes. I only expected her to take them out of the box, put them back in the box, and simply work on her touch. What did she do? She surprised me and started to untwist all of these, quickly, without any problem, full fine motor functioning! It was then I realized, she is not a Ruby, she's an Amber, just showing lower sensory needs! How much we can miss and how much we can realize a person's abilities if we give them the right job to do.

Just like here in the US, Marlena is working to spread knowledge and awareness first so that maybe others around her can experience the joys of the Positive Approach™ to Care Skills. She is focused on practicing her own skills every day while also sharing what she has learned in the most influential way possible, through PAC Trainings.

Marlena's final note is that she wants above all else; *I can see the light in this tunnel and most of all, I want to let people see that there is still a human being behind the dementia.*

Great work Marlena, Poland is lucky to have you!