

Australia, eh?

As a Paediatric Occupational Therapist working on a Neurological Rehabilitation Team, I am constantly surrounded by those therapists with 'magic hands'. You know who I mean – those gentle souls who softly guide their children to move, maintain postures in perfect alignment, communicate, and complete functional tasks all with a touch of their hands. Their sessions are child-led, and yet miraculously effective. In my pre Neuro-Developmental Treatment practice, I wanted my sessions to look like that. I wanted magic hands.

In my pre NDT days, I would treat the children on my caseload for spasticity management. My hands would softly cup their scapulae, I would check upper extremity range of motion, or maybe do some gentle stretches of the elbow flexors and hand musculature prior to an activity. I was able to effectively observe a client and make comment on how NON-aligned they were, and could use my hands to coax them to alignment – and then I would use the magic of OT (foam and duct tape for the most part) to keep them in position. I was good at problem listing and determining factors that affected the occupational performance of the children I worked with; I just didn't do a lot of problem solving. I felt confident in my ability to assess, but I felt I lacked skills in the area of treatment.

The more I learned about NDT and the more I observed NDT therapists in action, the more I realized that the philosophy of NDT, the framework that NDT trained therapists use to base their approach on was one that I wanted to adopt and incorporate into my practice. I loved that the NDT approach was individualized and client/family centered and that intervention principles are based entirely on functional goals.

I approached my NDT training as a life goal. I live in a small town in Eastern Canada where certification courses in any rehabilitation framework are rarely hosted. I knew I would need to travel and leave my husband, my 17 month old son Jack and my caseload at work behind. The decision was a tough one. When I realized that the only NDT Certification course that logistically would fit into my life was being offered in Geelong, Australia, the decision became slightly more complicated. On one hand, it was Australia! It would mean that I could check another life goal off my list. On the other hand, it was Australia- the furthest possible place that I could be away from my family.

I struggled with the decision to leave but only briefly. I knew my husband was amazing and could give Jack everything he needed over the time that I was gone. I knew that Jack was adaptable and happy and willing to hang out exclusively with dad for a while. I knew that my family and friends would support us all. I knew that it would be more difficult for me than anyone else. I also knew that being confident, happy and fulfilled in my career, and being an effective therapist would be commended by my family in years to come. I felt I was

teaching Jack that it's good to put effort into everything that you do, to work hard to meet goals that you set for yourself and that hard work and sacrifice will pay off in the end.

I'm very lucky to be working in a government funded centre that has priority in educational pursuits. My teammates graciously gave up their own education money so that I was well supported to attend the NDT training in Australia. My husband graciously gave up our renovation money to do the same and off I went.

I became engulfed in NDT treatment. I met therapists from around the world. I was mentored by amazing instructors, who I now can call friends. I treated kids and got fantastic functional changes. I had child led sessions that were miraculously effective. I grew magic hands.

I learned to approach the children on my caseload from a completely different perspective. I can now articulate the reasons why I put my hands where I do. I prepare kids for activity first, and ensure I have outcome measures to base my progress. I am able to identify not only the posture and movement strategies that my kids are demonstrating – but LIST reasons for why those strategies are being used. I can treat the primary impairments that have led our children to adopt the posture and movement strategies that they do. I learned how crucial it was to work with the other disciplines on our team to achieve the same goals. I was reminded on how vitally important play is in treatment and how motivating it is for kids when they are learning new skills.

Now that I'm home, and I know that Jack remembers me, I look back and am in awe of the experience that I had. In my Post-NDT practice, I'm always prepared for sessions and am excited to see those kids who I was 'stuck' with before. I am keen to engage myself in further NDT training, and I'm ready to take on anything. I feel confident and empowered as an Occupational Therapist. I feel effective. My hands may not be truly magic, but they can and will make change.

I want to send my sincere thanks out to Suzanne, Kate and Monica who have truly changed the way I look at my practice and the kids that I see. I inspire to be as gifted as you all are in your fields. And to my girls from wherever you're from – Where's the love? Oh, here it is.

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