

Occupational Therapy (OT) Excitement in Salt Lake City

by Debi Tyler, OTR/L,
PAC Client Relationship Director

In mid-April, Mary and Debi from **Positive Approach® to Care** (PAC) traveled to Salt Lake City for the annual **American Occupational Therapy Association** Conference. Our goal was to connect with the 6,000 plus attendees with interest in dementia care and share some of the resources Positive Approach® has to offer. Once our booth was all set up and looking snazzy, we wandered around to some of the other exhibitors to see what products and resources might be of interest. What an array of interesting things! Our neighboring booth had shoes and clothing—but this was nothing you would find at Target or Macy's. They had a line of reversible soft cotton garments which have no front or back—there's no wrong way to put them on! They also had lace-up athletic shoes with a concealed zipper around the perimeter of the shoe for easy on and off. Some of our fellow exhibitors included; **PESI**, **MedBridge**, **iN2L**, **Carfit**, and many more. They had colorful products for pediatric and adult populations to engage, strengthen, and ease the challenges of daily activities such as; dining, bathing, and dressing.

The keynote speaker was Nyle Dimarco, from *Dancing with the Stars* and winner of *Top Model*. Nyle is deaf, and his entire one-hour speech was presented using sign language and then translated live. He has over 25 deaf extended family members and spoke of the challenges he had growing up and overcoming obstacles. His key point was, “Your difference is your asset!”

Interest in the PAC booth was steady over the three consecutive days. There were 150 attendees who expressed interest in our **Online Dementia Journal**, picked up bookmarks, and examined samples of the **Dementia Caregiver Guide** and the **DVDs**. There were many conversations with students nearing graduation who had an interest in serving those with dementia, with educators in OT programs asking about dementia curriculum, with individuals who became tearful discussing a loved one with dementia, and with many clinicians who either squealed with delight as they recognized Teepa's image or were unfamiliar but intrigued with what we shared in regard to “Positive Approach.”

There were also some *small world* experiences, including someone who saw the Positive Approach® to Care name badge and introduced himself as a former student of Teepa's. He trained with her when he did his first clinical rotation in Occupational Therapy. He is now on the **Utah Occupational Therapy Association Board** and expressed a desire to stay connected. Sitting at the lunch table in the food mall, Debi looked up and saw her first OT boss ever from Atlanta, Georgia—37 years ago.

We had some laughter as people stopped by for selfies with the *larger-than-life* Teepa on the banner, including some attendees from Xavier in Cincinnati. Fred Sammons, the “granddaddy of adaptive equipment” with the Sammons Preston catalog perched atop a stool in his bright red shirt as attendees congratulated him on his recent more than 90th

birthday. An occupational therapist who said he had been to a course by Teepa, remarked that he always says, “With Teepa, no Sleepa!” referring to the liveliness of the course.

Most importantly, it was a worthwhile opportunity to offer others a glimpse of the services and products available through Positive Approach® to Care and to help them personally or professionally in dementia care.

Debi Tyler, OTR/L brings to PAC years of experience working with older adults, dementia care experience, and a long history with Teepa Snow. She was educated at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts, obtained a degree in Occupational Therapy, and has provided decades of care and leadership for rehabilitation settings in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Ohio. Early in her career, she recognized her passion for working in gerontology, and has been constantly enriched by the colorful stories and experiences of that population. As the Client Relationship Director for PAC, she helps to coordinate training and service offerings to clients with the goal of growing dementia awareness, skills, and competence.

Debi is energized by family, her loyal, loving golden retriever, travel, and experimenting with new recipes, photography, and her latest creative project.