

Paula Termini's Story

by Colleen Kruse

In a west-central Florida community where many women's lives are characterized by isolation, fear and uncertainty, Paula Termini was able to bring a measure of comfort and reassurance by performing massage therapy on pregnant women and teaching mothers to massage their babies. Many gifts and talents converged that made it possible for Paula to bring massage therapy to these women and infants without having to charge them for the sessions. For her bilingual skills, she thanks the Peace Corps, where she served in Colombia and Costa Rica in the 1970s. For her knowledge and familiarity with mothers and infants, she thanks her 17 years of working as an R.N. labor/delivery nurse. For her skills as a massage therapist, she thanks the training she received at Sarasota School of Massage Therapy. And for not having to charge for her massage services, she thanks the Massage Therapy Foundation.

When Paula worked as a labor and delivery nurse, her focus was "women at risk," a description that encompasses a wide spectrum of risks. Some had been sexually abused, some physically abused, some were in the United States without immigration documentation, and almost all were without a strong female support group. Paula became more engaged with this population of women through a teen/parent program, Cyesis, through the Sarasota Public School System. Her involvement included teaching childbirth and prenatal education, breast feeding education, and giving peer-to-peer training.

"When I chose to change my career path, I wanted a profession that would give me a one-on-one connection and would let me stay involved with mothers in need," Paula says. She chose massage and a specialization in prenatal massage.

She worked with African American, Caucasian, and Latino women who could benefit from massage but lacked access due to cost or exposure. Through her involvement with Healthy Start, Paula already enjoyed an intimate knowledge of the Hispanic community. She says, "The majority of women are here without their families. They are isolated, partly because many of them are undocumented, and they live in fear of being discovered. Many are afraid to go outside their homes. They are pregnant and, at a time in their lives when they need a support system and good education, their mothers, sisters, aunts—the support system they would have at home—are not with them."

A grant from the Massage Therapy Foundation enabled Paula to rent space in a spa-like environment on an as-needed basis. She received referrals through Healthy Start, as well as from the county health department's women's outreach program, and through her contacts within the community.

"Many of the Hispanic women had never experienced massage. They had hardly experienced anyone taking care of them. It was always them taking care of others. They enjoyed the physical and stress reduction benefits of massage, but I think the greatest benefit to them was emotional, especially since they are away from their families."

The initial thinking behind the grant proposal was that Paula would provide approximately 60 massages, one each to selected moms and infants. But she found that the benefits, both to the moms and to her, of providing a series of massages paid greater dividends in terms of time spent and clients' feelings of security. She explains, "It took a lot of work initially to get women to show up for their appointments. I had quite a few no-shows at first. When you're renting a room and driving to meet someone, you have to pay for the room whether they show up or not."

She found that once the women became comfortable with the idea of massage, they wanted to come once a month, then once every two weeks, then once a week. The outcome of these massages is more anecdotal than research-based:

"One mom who came for four visits took three buses to get to me. It took her an hour and a half to arrive for each massage, and then I would take her home."

"I used lavender with one mom. She said it helped calm her. She said she bought some herself and used it with her 4-year-old son to help him 'rein in' his behavior."

"One mom had terrible carpal tunnel syndrome, and she insisted that one massage relieved her pain."

"Another mom came a week before her due date and said she hadn't slept for days. She got on the table and I had hardly put my hands on her and she was snoring. I rolled her to her side

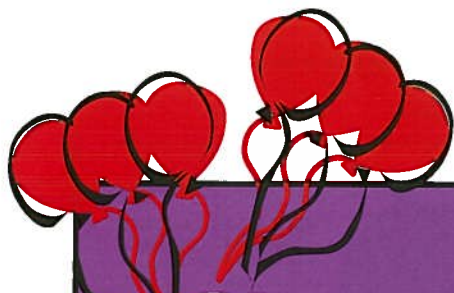
and let her sleep. She slept for 90 minutes on my massage table, and delivered a healthy baby 36 hours later. She said she was so grateful to have rested before she had the baby.”

Paula’s experience with infant massage, also part of the Massage Therapy Foundation grant, revealed that she was providing much-needed education to the moms and their babies. Working with Healthy Start moms, she asked them their first memories of being touched. Many of them related stories of being hit, being pushed, being sexually abused. “The moms responded immediately to the idea of teaching their children about loving and appropriate touch. Doing infant massage gave them permission to touch their children in a loving way.”

One mom who had lost her baby came to the infant massage group because she had been in classes with the moms who had delivered. Paula used stuffed bears for the moms to practice massage on, and she had an extra one, which she gave to the woman. “It was very meaningful for her just to be able to hold the bear,” Paula said. “Someone told me later she carries that bear with her

everywhere. Sometimes the physical benefits of massage-increased circulation, decreased swelling-don’t compare with the emotional benefits. This woman felt safe with us and knew it was okay to let go of her emotions.”

A message from the Massage Therapy Foundation: We are a 501(c) 3 public charity whose mission is to advance the knowledge and practice of massage therapy by supporting scientific research, education, and community service. Our community service granting program fosters massage therapy initiatives that serve populations in need. To read summaries of other community service projects, or to make an online donation to help fund projects like Paula’s, please visit www.massagetherapyfoundation.org.



Chapter Hospitality

Volunteers needed for 2009 AMTA National Convention
 Contact Pat Donohue
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DAY-BREAK



The DAYBREAK Geriatric Massage Institute is an organization dedicated to enhancing quality of life in order to make living more enjoyable for the elderly by teaching health care professionals the use of skillful hands-on work and current trends in massage modalities for the aging. This type of massage takes age-related health conditions, from robust to frail seniors into focus.

The Institute was founded in 1982 and has been teaching 40 plus workshops a year from Nova Scotia to Singapore and from coast to Coast in the USA.

The Workshops are both beginning and advanced levels and each is approved as a continuing education by the NCBTMB, FSMTA and CMTBC (British Columbia) for 17 CE each.

Day-Break Geriatric Massage Institute Upcoming Workshop Dates					
Level 1		Level 1 Continued		Level 2	
July 11-13	Houston, TX	Oct 3-5	Tampa, FL	July 25-27	Austin, TX
Aug 22-24	Virginia Beach, VA	Oct 10-12	Philadelphia, PA	August 8-10	Toledo, OH
Aug 29-31	Mt Jefferson, NC	Oct 17-19	Ankern, IA	Sept 12-14	Houston, TX
Sept 5-7	Traverse City, MI	Nov 7-9	Lancaster, PA	Sept 26-28	Sycamore, IL
Sept 26-28	Seattle, WA	Nov 14-16	Charlotte, NC	Oct 10-12	Citrus Heights, CA
Sept 26-28	Santa Cruz, CA	Nov 21-23	Pittsburgh, PA	Oct 24-26	Virginia Beach, VA
			Indianapolis, IN	Nov 7-9	St. Louis, MO
				Nov 7-9	Citrus Heights, CA
				Dec 5-7	Santa Cruz, CA

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 Geriatric Massage Institute

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