



# Persona Doll Training

EMBRACING DIVERSITY



NEWSLETTER | OCTOBER 2014

## Celebration of our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Launch of new website and brochure

On 31 July 2014, PDT achieved another milestone in our history – our tenth anniversary. We celebrated in style at the Village Bistro, and used the occasion to launch the new PDT website (see <http://pdt.org.za>) and a colourful new brochure advertising the work of PDT. Outgoing chairperson Thikam Pillay spoke about how PDT has developed over the last 10 years and the hard work and commitment that has gone into Embracing Diversity and making PDT such a wonderful, effective and worthwhile NGO. Thikam introduced the new chair Cally Kuhne to everyone. Director Carol Smith thanked all the staff, the Board, partners and friends who have contributed to the achievements of PDT and wished everyone 'Happy 10 years!'



Outgoing Chairperson Thikam Pillay

Guests were then treated to an on-screen preview of the revamped website, which is linked to our social media accounts – Facebook (please visit and 'like' our page or leave a comment), Twitter and our blog. In another sneak preview, we saw a trailer of our up-coming DVD – and our thanks go again to Selina Mudavanhu of the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town for the creative camera work.



Our special thanks to The Village Bistro for hosting us for this celebration! The food tasted and looked delicious, and catered for the diverse tastes of our guests – and the exquisite decorated Anniversary and Birthday cake was baked for us by Caro from Divine Cupcakes.

## Persona Doll Training of Trainers Programme (PDT TOT)

In 2010, we developed and facilitated the first Training of Trainers Pilot Programme for PDT. The training took place in Durban in August 2010 at TREE for 19 participants from seven different projects based in KwaZulu Natal.

The Persona Doll approach is deeply embedded in an anti-bias approach, in understanding diversity and inclusive practice, and in promoting human rights.

### **The five-day programme focused on three areas:**

- Personal development
- Professional development
- Persona Doll approach.

We believe it is essential that time and a safe space are created for participants to focus on themselves. In these sessions, we explore attitudes, biases, behaviours and experiences. Time is spent on self-reflection, self-awareness and journaling. The focus on the adults –acknowledging who they are, valuing and validating them, building their sense of self-worth and value – has proven to be invaluable. Built into the training are theories of adult education, groups and group dynamics as well as facilitation skills. The introduction of the Persona Dolls and the approach follows as a natural next step in the training. By then, the participants have experienced and understood the importance of self-esteem and self-worth, the importance of identity and background. The Dolls are fully appreciated as valuable tools in their work.

Many participants commented on having *'made shifts in their thinking'*, *'of moving forward'*, *'of re-evaluating and re-defining themselves'*, and *'of re-emerging'*.

Based on their experience and the positive feedback received from participants, the trainers expressed a strong desire for funding to be secured to run more PDT TOT Programmes. In 2014, three more TOT programmes were run in Cape Town, KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. The format of the training has developed to allow for a 'module 2' to be offered, where the main focus is on implementation of the Persona Doll approach and successes and challenges experienced in the field.

The second TOT took place in March 2014 in Cape Town at Foundation for Community Work (FCW). Participants included training coordinators, trainers, community workers, Family and Community motivators, mentors, and private consultants. The 20 participants were from the following organisations: Ikamva Labantu, PRAESA – Nali Bali, Sikhula Sonke, FCW, IEWC/PDT and True North.

The third TOT took place in August 2014 in Durban at TREE. The participants included trainers, social workers, mentors and senior mentors, a mother, ECD practitioners and family workers. The

25 participants were from the following organisations: TREE, NACCW, Zizise, Woza Moya, Bulungula and Khetimpilo.

The fourth TOT took place in Gauteng in September 2014 and was attended by 25 NACCW staff, including senior mentors, mentor supervisors, mentors and child and youth care workers from seven provinces.

We believe that it is an honour and privilege to facilitate training of this nature. The training has strengthened our belief in the value of anti-bias work and the Persona Doll approach, as well as the importance of understanding groups and facilitation. It also highlighted the opportunity and scope for personal development and affirmed our belief in the importance of providing space for personal growth and psycho-social support. This was evident in shifts both we and the group observed in a number of participants in terms of their confidence, self-esteem, engagement with content, interaction with others in the group, and ultimately their roleplaying with the Persona Dolls.



**The following comments from participants share the insights they gained and the benefit they derived from the training:**

- *I needed to do this a long time ago. I felt valued. It was healing. I now have hope.*
- *I am on a journey to find myself and create myself. This week gave me a chance to be healed*
- *I was honest with myself for the first time. I journeyed and asked myself: "How did I conquer things". I have strength. It gave me hope that there is support.*
- *I did a true self-reflection for the first time*
- *My past was there for a purpose. ....to learn about life.*
- *We are blessed to be here. I am a different person now. I have changed*
- *The learning process was more about us, reflecting on our past, restructuring our mind-sets and attitudes. One of a kind training.*
- *I loved the flow of the training allowing for maximum participation. I realize I am growing personally and professionally. A realization that I do not have to shrink small for others to grow.*
- *Your facilitation and focus on personal development.....it was like a gift to us.*
- *I'm in the right place, at the right time, with the right people. I've done Persona Doll training before, now my mind is ready to receive Persona Doll training. This process is so rich.*

Involvement in the TOT is an exhilarating, intense, extremely humbling and honouring experience. We all grow and learn together. Thank you to all for the opportunity to experience and believe that we are making a difference in people's lives and ultimately in the lives of young children.

Thikam Pillay and Pat Birkett

## Interview with a Practitioner about using Persona Dolls.

### **When did you start using the dolls at your centre?**

I was exposed to the dolls in May 2013, but I was reluctant to use the dolls immediately at my centre. I wanted to be sure that my staff and I first had a good understanding of how to use the dolls. Hence I held workshops with my staff and ran mock sessions with them to ensure that they were comfortable with the dolls, before implementing their use in the classrooms.

### **How many dolls do you have and what are their names?**

We have two dolls and their names are Musa Mandla and Moeneebah Ismail.

### **How often do you bring them to visit?**

As a rule staff must include at least one session with the dolls per week. The session must be included in their weekly planning schedule.

### **Do they remain in the group for the children to interact with during activity times?**

Not as yet. Our dolls attend other schools and visit us from time to time. This is the story we have given to our learners.

### **Have you noticed any changes in your attitudes since using the dolls?**

Yes. At first I was not very keen on using the dolls as it was all too new to me. I became more and more confident with every session I had with my class. I then realised I now have another exciting and dynamic tool with which I can capture the imagination of my learners. I enjoy the different reactions the children have to our doll and am amazed by the type of teaching opportunities that arise from using the dolls, specifically as regards tolerance. I am also more aware of my learners' emotional needs and realise that I need to create opportunities for my learners to explore such emotions.

### **a. In the staff's attitudes?**

Initially my staff members were very nervous to use the dolls. A useful strategy that I employed to get them comfortable was to ask another staff member to video record them. They could then view the video on their own and make mental adjustments for the next time they use the doll. I find that since then we have made a concerted effort to focus on inclusivity in our school. We are more tolerant and aware of the plethora of situations our learners face in and out of school and that they need to be guided through these. Since the last term of 2013 we have a designated inclusive champion at our school, whose duty it is to table issues relating to inclusivity at our weekly meetings.

### **b. In the children's attitudes?**

It is a bit early to say how the dolls have effected change in the attitudes of our learners. But the learners clearly do enjoy the dolls visits and they do show concern for the doll.

## **Did you experience any challenges when introducing the dolls?**

Yes. We had learners who had difficulty in seeing past the fact that Musa was in fact just a doll. We also had learners who insisted that Musa could not speak and that the teacher was making the words up. One of our younger learners was actually scared of the doll. I still have one staff member who is not comfortable using the doll.

## **Do the parents at your centre know about the dolls?**

Yes, we spoke to some of the parents last year about the dolls. However this year we have spoken about our persona dolls at our parent teacher meeting. We have sketched out the dolls' personas to them and gave a brief outline of how we are using them in the class. I do think that we are going to need to hold an information type of workshop a bit later on with our parents.

## **What are some of the stories you have done with the children using the dolls?**

We have had many stories and sometimes you start off with something in mind and then the responses of the learners take you on different path. Issues we have handled have been:

Fasting and how our learners cope with it

Bullying

Awareness of safety during the holiday season

Sharing

New learner in the class

Results of an experiment done in the class.

## **Do all your staff feel comfortable planning stories and using the dolls?**

No. Currently we do have a teacher who is reluctant to use the doll on her own. She cites the reason is that the toddlers in her class are afraid of the doll. I also have a new staff member who has not been exposed to the concept of the persona doll.

## **Any other comments? What would you like to say to those who are new to using the Dolls?**

With everything new that comes our way in life, we always tend to approach it with some trepidation, but after we have had some exposure we soon find ourselves thinking: "Why did I not do this sooner". That is how I feel about using the persona dolls. Initially I did not think that I would be able to tell my doll's story and make the children believe it and respond to it. On top of that I also had a facilitator who acquitted herself of the task with such ease and confidence that I was convinced that I did not have it in me to get it right. However, thanks to her guidance she was able to encourage me into believing that I could and I can confidently say: "Now I can". Thus I suppose what I am trying to say is that I tried and that you won't know if you can unless you have tried. I have grown quite attached to my persona doll. They really provide opportunities to address difficult questions and issues and they are a very useful, even essential, tool to have in the classroom.

Kouthar Ebrahim – IQRA Educare

## **Diversity Play Dolls – 'proudly South African'**

PDT is excited and proud to announce the launch of a new range of Dolls. The Diversity Play Dolls are unique, hand-made 50cm tall boy and girl Dolls of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, anatomically correct with authentic hair, eye and skin colours and movable limbs. The Dolls come dressed in a set of removable clothing, and props or other outfits can be improvised to enhance play. These durable Dolls can be repaired with a needle and thread, and can be washed in a washing machine.





The idea behind the Diversity Play Dolls is to create acceptance of diversity by demonstrating the values and heritage we all bring to our culture. Children can identify with Dolls that 'look like them', building confidence and reinforcing a positive sense of identity in terms of gender, culture, faith, community. Children learn about tolerance, respect and diversity from Dolls that look different or are from a different culture or community.

A Diversity Play Doll is a perfect gift for a child – and supports the income-generating project that creates each Doll with love by hand.

**We would like to thank our funders because without them we would not be able to continue to support communities and their children and to work for a better South Africa for all.**

**National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund, Anglo American Chairman's Fund, DG Murray Trust, Department of Social Development, Apex Hi, A G Fine Trust**

