
◆ BrainWaves ◆

Volume 27 Issue 2

The Community Skills Program® Newsletter

Summer 2011

Information on New Groups

We are excited about the development of some new group opportunities for persons with brain injuries. We believe strongly in the advantages of collaborating with other providers and organizations to make possible the services and supports people want or need, so we've been busy collaborating.

In northern New Jersey, a new Union/Somerset support group, affiliated with the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, Inc. (BIANJ), will be held on the second Thursday of every month at 6:00 p.m. at our Community Skills Program office at 776 Mountain Boulevard, Watchung, NJ 07069, beginning September 8, 2011. The new support group in Watchung is being co-facilitated by Nina Geier, M.S., M.P.T., PT, CBIS, program coordinator for northern New Jersey, and Renee Puglisi, B.S., CTRS, CBIS, client services liaison for northern New Jersey, both with Community Skills Program. For more information on this group, please contact Nina Geier at (908) 753-1595.

In southern New Jersey, we are pleased to offer our space at 5000 Sagemore Drive, Suite 203, Marlton, NJ 08053, to Dr. Mark Rader and Ms. Nutan Ravani, who will continue to facilitate the Burlington/Camden Group they have been facilitating at Marlton Rehabilitation Hospital. This support group is also affiliated with the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, Inc. and is held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. Maria Zakula, M.A., CBIS, program coordinator for southern New Jersey for Community Skills Program, will also be on-site to host this group and assist as needed. For information on this group, please contact Dr. Rader at (856) 667-3330 or Ms. Ravani at (856) 589-5797.

Our staff participate in other support groups affiliated with the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania, Inc. to offer support and to learn (as always) from the experiences of people with brain injuries and their family members. Support groups offer a forum for persons with a brain injury and their family members to meet others in similar situations, gain valuable emotional support and friendships, obtain information and learn about helpful resources, and hear speakers discuss a variety of brain injury-related topics.

In Pennsylvania, a new therapeutic activities group is being developed, to begin in early Fall at our office in Berks County, at 1150 Berkshire Boulevard, Suite 245, Wyomissing, PA 19610. This group will be held one day each week, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. We are gathering information from prospective members on the preferred day, so please call Dr. Sally Kneipp, director of Community Skills Program, at (610) 376-3380 if you are interested in this group and want to let us know your preference for the day of the week.

Our "Out and About Group" in Berks County is active, has increased the number of participants, and is deciding on ideas for the Fall. This group meets once a month at various locations in and around Berks County. Community Skills Program is grateful to Abilities in Motion (a center for independent living in Reading, PA) for allowing our "Out and About Group" to meet in their conference room (it is larger than ours) on August 25th to play bingo, and to use their adaptive bingo cards. (Thanks very much!)

More groups are in the works. Stay tuned!

Update

- Welcome to our new clients—Amara, Bonnie, Claudia, Dona, George, Loretta, Matthew, Michelle, Terry and Yvonne.

In this issue of *BrainWaves*, we only have space to mention a few of our clients' activities, since there were more submissions than usual for "Creativity Corner" (see pages 5 and 6) and we ran out of space. Other activities of our clients and staff will be mentioned in the next issue of *BrainWaves*.

- Yvonne has taken her third art class, Alla Prima Figure Painting, at Fleisher Art Memorial in Philadelphia, PA, and also began participating in the art program at the Philadelphia Senior Center.
- John continues to attend the Messiah Village adult day program on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and to volunteer at New Hope Ministries on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He and his wife also recently went on a trip to Williamsburg, Virginia, and reported that they enjoyed it. It was their first trip away since John's accident in 2009.
- Adam continues to work out at Body Zone, volunteer, bowl in a summer league, attend (his schedule permitting) two brain injury support groups, and participate in our "Out and About Group."

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Spotlight: Michael Sadek



Michael Sadek

Spotlight: Michael, tell us a little about yourself.

Michael: I was born in Egypt and I moved here [to the U.S.] in 2005. I had my injury in December of 2007.

Spotlight: What happened to you? How were you injured?

Michael: I fell down from...they say 25 feet, but I don't know. I was in a coma for 2½ months, and in inpatient rehabilitation for months. Since 2007 until 2011, I'm still in rehabilitation...I have a lot of problems.

Spotlight: Tell me about your life in Egypt, before your injury.

Michael: I finished my high school and went to college for social work. I worked in a medicine company for three years.

Spotlight: When you say a medicine company, what does that mean?

Michael: After I graduated from college, I worked for a company selling medicine from a company to pharmacies.

Spotlight: So, you were a distributor for medicine to pharmacies. When you came to the U.S., what type of work did you do?

Michael: I started working in the airport [referring to Newark Liberty Airport], cleaning aircrafts, as a driver's helper, and then a driver. I was supposed to be an assistant manager, but then I had my accident.

Spotlight: Where did you initially receive medical treatment after your injury?

Michael: First at The University Hospital in Newark [NJ]. I stayed for months over there. After that, they transferred me to Kessler in West Orange [NJ] for three months. After that, I went to Universal Institute in Livingston [NJ], and then to outpatient services at Kessler for about six months. Since then, I have had Opportunity Project and Community Skills Program until right now.

Spotlight: You are still receiving treatment through Opportunity Project and Community Skills Program. How often do you go to Opportunity Project? [Note: Opportunity Project is a clubhouse program for individuals with brain injuries, located in Millburn, NJ.]

Michael: I go there two days a week, on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Spotlight: What kinds of things do you do there?

Michael: We have cooking...one person will teach us to cook. We have support group meetings. And, I work with them on organizing papers [for information packets]. Sometimes we go shopping at ShopRite, and we have time to work on the computer. We have a lot of people who have had brain injuries, but it depends on how much injury you have. Some people have wheelchairs and some people can't talk well. But, it's a safe place for us where we can all sit down and talk.

Spotlight: When you were injured, you were here in the United States by

yourself, right? You had no family here.

Michael: Yeah, before my injury.

Spotlight: After you were injured, who was there to support you?

Michael: My parents—my father and my mother.

Spotlight: They came from Egypt?

Michael: Yeah, they came from Egypt about two weeks after I was injured, when I was in Newark at The University Hospital. And they have stayed until now. Sometimes I have both of them here, but sometimes I have just one of them because they work over in Egypt. But, I always have at least one of them. Right now, I just have my father here with me.

Spotlight: You are very lucky that your parents have been able to come here to help you in your recovery.

Michael: Yeah, they first had tourist visas to stay only six months, but they now have green cards and can stay forever. Since I got my U.S. citizenship, they have been able to stay here.

Spotlight: So, let's talk a little more about your treatment with Community Skills Program. How long have you been a client with us?

Michael: Since April of 2009.

Spotlight: Because you have been with us for a long time, you have progressed from doing easier things to doing harder and harder things.

Michael: At first, I could not do things like laundry by myself, but, after a while, I could do the laundry downstairs at my apartment. My father supervises me. I don't go by myself, for safety. I plan my shopping with Community Skills Program. I still have problems with transportation. I am going to ESL [English as a Second Language] class at the Jersey City Library.

Spotlight: When you started ESL, at what level were you placed?

Michael: I was at a basic level, but now I am higher.

Spotlight: What kind of classes and clubs did you have at ESL?

Michael: I first did a program on the computer at ESL. Then, I started with video club...and, now I do other things. I can watch TV by myself, so I go to book club instead of video club. I just moved up to the higher-level book club.

Spotlight: What do you like best about the book club?

Michael: I'm learning a lot about words every day, and I talk a lot, so I'm helping my English. When I was working at the airport, I was talking a lot and knew a lot of English. Now, I'm not working, so I don't get to use a lot of English.

Spotlight: Do you think you have forgotten a lot of English?

Michael: Maybe, but I learned a lot of English at the airport. Maybe I am learning at the book club. But, at the airport, I was there 10 hours a day; I had to talk a lot. I learned a lot of English there because there was a lot of conversation. When I stopped working, I lost a lot of English.

Spotlight: You also needed to learn more English to take the test at your citizenship interview; correct? That was an important part to your becoming a citizen.

Michael: Yeah, I had 100 questions to learn for the citizenship test. I studied for three or four months. I learned the answers, but, at the interview, I only had to answer a few questions. I was told that I received a medical exemption, because of my injury.

Spotlight: But then why did you want to study the questions?

Michael: To make sure; if I would need to take the test, I should know the answers. But, I had medical reasons to be exempt from the exam. I did not know until I got there whether I needed to take the test. You [referring to Nina Geier, M.S., M.P.T., PT, CBIS,

program coordinator for northern New Jersey for Community Skills Program] helped me to get ready for the interview and learn the answers.

Spotlight: When you were studying for the 100 questions, what did you have the most difficulty learning?

Michael: Names.

Spotlight: So, what strategy did you use to learn the difficult answers?

Michael: When I needed to learn a number, like how many years a senator serves, I remembered that six and senator both started with "S."

Spotlight: So, you learned associations and rhymes (for example, words that began with the same letter or that sounded the same).

Michael: Yeah.

Spotlight: So, remember, the president during World War I, started with a "W"? Who was he?

Michael: Woodrow Wilson. Started with a "W" sound...I have a hard time with names. But, I got good at it.

Spotlight: So, how did you learn the rest of the questions?

Michael: I studied over and over...I started with knowing 68%, then 75%; the last test I got 96% correct.

Spotlight: So, you learned the rest of the answers by repetition.

Michael: I always had a CD and played it on my laptop.

Spotlight: You spent a lot of time and stuck with it. That was a lot of work. When did you become a citizen?

Michael: In November of 2010.

Spotlight: Most recently, you have been working a lot on staying healthy—trying to live a healthier lifestyle and to eat healthier food. Tell me about that.

Michael: John [referring to his neuro-rehabilitation specialist with Community Skills Program, John Roussos, B.A.] is helping me a lot to choose healthy food when I'm shopping. Before, I was eating things like mortadella, and it's not so healthy. He's teaching me to

choose things like turkey...no more mortadella because it makes me more fat. Before, I ate sweet things like apple turnovers for breakfast. Now I eat cereal and yogurt for breakfast. Before, I would drink regular milk. Now I drink one percent milk. My father helps me make a list to go food shopping.

Spotlight: At first after your injury, how much did you weigh?

Michael: In April 2008, I weighed 115, and I was six feet, one inch tall.

Spotlight: So, you had a hard time eating initially?

Michael: Yes, I had a problem with my stomach. But, by January 2011, I was 205 pounds. My doctor told me to lose weight because 205 is too much. Right now, I'm 188 pounds.

Spotlight: So, you lost 17 pounds.

Michael: It's easy to lose nine pounds, but it's hard to lose 17 pounds. It's easy to be fat.

Spotlight: But, you persevered at that, too, and stuck with your diet.

Michael: It's easy to be fat. From 115 to 205 was very easy, but from 205 to 188 was hard. At first, I was being told to eat to gain weight, and now it's hard to lose weight and find a balance.

Spotlight: But, why is it important to eat well and be at a healthy weight?

Michael: You are supposed to watch what you eat if you want to be healthy. And, make sure you eat not too much bread, not too much macaroni, not too much rice. And, choose what kind of meat and milk you eat. It's very hard, but I want to be 180 pounds.

Spotlight: Other than your diet, what else are you doing to be healthy?

Michael: Before, when I was working, I was moving around a lot. But, because I'm not working now, I'm not moving around a lot. I stay home a lot. So, I started to go to the gym.

Spotlight: Who said it was okay to go to the gym?

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Spotlight continued (from page 3)

Michael: My doctor [referring to Mary Ibrahim, M.D.]. When I first went to the gym, I worked hard and I started to get too tired and did not eat well. I had terrible sleep—I slept 14 hours if I exercised. So, Dr. Ibrahim said I needed to cut down my exercise. I cut down the time I am at the gym.

Spotlight: So, you had to learn how much you could handle. And, you learned the right level of activity so you could eat well, exercise well, and sleep well.

Michael: Yes. So, I'm now doing good. I got advice from Dr. Ibrahim and a personal trainer at the Forum [in Bayonne, NJ] to learn how much exercise to do.

Spotlight: And, what is John's role when you are at the Forum?

Michael: I sometimes miss the instructions they tell me, so John makes sure I remember and stay on track with what I was told to do. He also makes sure I stay safe on the treadmill, because I lose my balance when I close my eyes.

Spotlight: Other than book club, therapies and the gym, what other productive things are you doing? What else is important to you in your life?

Michael: I do some volunteering at my church to bake bread on Saturday evening for the liturgy on Sunday. But, if I bake the bread on Saturday, I'm too tired to go to church on Sundays. I come home and go to sleep and then wake up too late on Sundays. I do not do much on Sundays.

Spotlight: Are you hoping your endurance will improve so you will be able to bake the bread on Saturday and tolerate going to church on Sunday?

Michael: Yes, I am doing better. I used to get headaches all day after making the bread. Now, I don't get too many headaches, but I still need to sleep. At church, they know about my

accident and what happened to me, so they understand what I can do. But, I feel like I'm sometimes being lazy.

Spotlight: Lazy does not sound like the correct word. I think you are doing a lot, but you are still learning to pace your activities. You do something active, then you rest, then do something active, and rest again.

Michael: Yes, but, before my injury, I was working all day every day. It has been four years that I have not been able to do that. But, I'm doing more than I did two years ago.

Spotlight: So, what kind of problems are you still working on in therapies?

Michael: Memory and balance. I don't know what is more of a problem.

Spotlight: So, you have been doing therapy for a long time because your injury was a few years ago. What are your goals to achieve through more therapy? What do you hope to be able to do?

Michael: I would like to finish therapy and come back to regular life.

Spotlight: What would a regular life include?

Michael: I still have a lot of problems. The therapy is helping me a lot. But, right now, I'm not sure what's possible after an injury like mine. I'm not sure what I will be able to do after five years of being injured. I don't know when I

would be able to stay at home by myself...or work.

Spotlight: So there is a lot to still work on. Do you have any advice for others recovering from brain injuries?

Michael: From 2007 until now, I have been taking advice from my doctors, case manager, and therapists. Always they give me advice. This is the first time since 2007 for me to give advice.

Spotlight: So, this is your chance. What advice do you have?

Michael: When you have a brain injury, it's a big difference in your life. In the first months, you are worried you may die. You can't talk, eat, do things by yourself...like a small baby. Then, you must think about your life... and, you can do it! Always listen to your case manager, your doctor, your therapists...they give you hard things to do, but it's good for you.

[Editor's Note: Many people and providers have been, and are, supportive of Michael's rehabilitation efforts. His parents remain committed to supporting Michael in making progress toward his rehabilitation goals. Michael's services are funded through Gallagher Bassett Services, Inc. Michael's case manager, Maria DeLeonardis, RN, CCM, with GENEX Services, Inc., is to be recognized for her understanding and support of Michael's rehabilitation needs.]



Michael exercising at the Forum Fitness Club.

Creativity Corner

Lady Fafa

by Corina Pehlman
(client of Community Skills Program)

In the summer of 2011, Community Skills Program started its “Out and About Group” for people in Berks and Schuylkill counties of Pennsylvania. The group most recently planned an event at a Reading Phillies game at the First Energy Stadium in Reading, PA, on Monday, June 21, 2011. I, Corina Pehlman, received a flyer in the mail to make me aware of the event. I was ecstatic because I LOVE baseball, so I asked Keila Rodriguez, B.S., my neurerehabilitation specialist with Community Skills Program, to take me. She said, “Certainly!” I thought of another young woman who had sustained a traumatic brain injury and got in touch with her and her family, urging them to come along as well. Keila told me to be ready at 5:30 p.m. that evening for the 6:00 p.m. start, and said that the group would gather outside the entrance. Once Keila picked me up, we found parking and met the group outside the gates and entered the stadium. Our seats were “general admission” seating in right field. Once our group was together, we walked to our seating area and found our seats. Since the Reading Phillies are an AA minor league team affiliated with the MLB Philadelphia Phillies, they have a lot of entertainment. The Philadelphia Phillies have a team mascot...the Phillie Phanatic. The Reading Phillies have their own Phanatic, Lady Fafa—a pun because she mimics the vocalist and celebrity Lady Gaga. She sang during the 7th inning stretch and danced. It was rather humorous. The Reading Phillies had another mascot walking around to entertain young children. He dresses as a beaver and is called “Bucky the Beaver.”

Below is a photo of Lady Fafa, Keila and me. I very much enjoyed the “Out and About Group” event and look forward to future outings! It is fun for people with disabilities, just like those without disabilities, to go out, socialize and have fun. I believe that is the ultimate goal of the Community Skills Program’s “Out and About Group.”



Accepting Help

by Denice DeAntonio
(client of Community Skills Program)

Accepting help after a brain injury is more than allowing others to do things for you. Accepting help is not giving up your independence, but a step toward gaining independence. It means listening to therapists, counselors and others when they say you are not ready to do something or when they say you need to do more before taking the next step. This was a hard lesson for me to learn. As a nurse, and usually the one providing the help, this was a difficult transition for me. Many times I insisted I knew better, only to find out I was wrong; I refused the offers of help by the rehabilitation counselors. For many reasons, I was not ready to go to a job interview, and I refused help or guidance. Looking back, I probably would not have been successful at a job at that time. Then it dawned on me; I was not helping myself, but hurting myself. Counselors and therapists are trained to assess and provide appropriate assistance as needed. They are not taking away, but trying to enhance independence. When I realized that, I started to ask for, and willingly accepted, the help and support offered, and things changed. I knew I was not alone in this journey to recovery. In fact, I have many people who want to walk with me on my journey; they are a part of my support group. We now work together because I know we are working toward the same goal—my living my life to its fullest. We are now a team, and I have seen success because I was willing to accept help. The journey to recovery has many hills and valleys. Accepting help allows you to celebrate with others when you reach the top of a hill and to have support when you are in a valley.

2011 Creativity Expo

The **2011 Creativity Expo** was a great success! Nearly 200 people visited this year's event, held July 9 to 17, 2011 at Raritan Valley Community College Art Gallery in North Branch, NJ. Approximately 40 artists participated in the expo. This year, three artists dedicated their artwork to the 9-11 World Trade Center tragedy. Also, four current clients of Community Skills Program exhibited their artwork. Andrew Matushewsky, a client of Community Skills Program, exhibited his artwork at the expo; his artwork was featured in our Winter 2010-2011 issue of *BrainWaves*. We have included below some photos of our other three clients who exhibited. You can see more photos from this year's expo at www.braininjuryartsnj.com. For more information on the event, call Vince Diorio at (703) 297-7726 or e-mail him at vincentd54@msn.com.



Kirk Kaszyk

A client of Community Skills Program, Kirk has participated very enthusiastically in the **Creativity Expo** over the past eight years. With the help of his neurorehabilitation specialist, Kirk works diligently on his art projects throughout the year in preparation for the expo. This year, he built a scale model of an 18th century sailing ship that he received as a Christmas gift. Kirk also built and displayed a model of his family home, which took him about 80 hours to complete, and what he described as the "ultimate doghouse" for his dog, Hilton. *[Editor's Note: Sadly, shortly after the expo, Hilton passed away.]*

Steven O'Connor

Steve, a client of Community Skills Program, has participated in the **Creativity Expo** since its inception eight years ago. He has exhibited a variety of artwork mediums, but, in most recent years, displayed his digital photography. This year, Steve submitted five of his photographs. With the help of his neurorehabilitation specialist, Steve enjoys photographing the outdoors. In preparation for the expo, Steve visited local parks and environmental centers where he photographed colorful floral scenes, a marsh, a garden gate, and a snake in a tree. Steve's favorite is the snake in a tree, which he describes as symbolizing good versus evil.



Thomas Segars

This was Tom's first year participating in the **Creativity Expo**. He worked with his neurorehabilitation specialist by going out into his community to a park and reservoir where he took digital photographs of the surrounding environment. Tom edited, framed and submitted five of his color photographs—a gnarly tree trunk, Koi fish in a pond, a colorful bonsai tree, purple flowers that looked like fireworks, and Tom's favorite, a hound dog named Duke. To see all of Tom's photographs, you can go to www.gotosnapshot.com/myblog/tom-segars-creativity-expo-2011.

Upcoming Events

- On Saturday, October 1, 2011, the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, Inc. will sponsor its annual **Walk for Thought** event, to help support individuals living with brain injury. There are two sites for the event—in Northern New Jersey at Saddle River County Park in Paramus, NJ, and in Central New Jersey at Mercer County Park in West Windsor, NJ (new this year). You can walk, cycle or roll at your own pace, and dogs are welcome. There will be activities for the whole family, including music, games and prizes, and a picnic lunch is provided. Registration begins at 9:00 a.m. You can also register online at www.bianj.org.
- On Tuesday, October 4, 2011, the Council on Brain Injury (CoBI) will host the 5th annual **David's Drive** golf tournament at White Manor Country Club in Malvern, PA. In addition to the golf tournament, events include lunch, a cocktail reception, dinner, auction, raffle, award presentation, and a free golf clinic. For more information or to register, call Rose Marie Dalton at (484) 595-9300, ext. 119 or visit CoBI's website at www.councilonbraininjury.org.
- From October 11 to 15, 2011, the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine (ACRM) and the American Society of Neurorehabilitation (ASNR) will hold a joint Annual Conference at the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta, GA. For more information, visit www.acrm.org or call Margo Holen at (317) 471-8760.

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We hope you are having a wonderful summer.
