
◆ Brain Waves ◆

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The Community Skills Program® Newsletter

Winter 2010-2011

Once More With Feeling...Creative

It feels good to create...to use one's imagination, talents, and uniqueness to produce something, and particularly something of value for oneself or others. Creativity can enhance one's self-esteem and quality of life.

We are impressed with the creativity of our clients and staff, and the ways they use their creativity to become more independent and more productive. We see numerous examples of our clients' creativity in artwork and other forms of creative expression. Andrew's creativity is featured on page 5 of this issue, and his evolution as an artist is evident. Ken, who is "spotlighted" in this issue beginning on page 2, uses his creativity in many beneficial and practical ways that also reveal his wonderful sense of humor. On page 7 is one of the many compensatory strategies he has created for his own personal development. This strategy is notable because it reflects his awareness of frustration (which we all experience at times) and the importance of managing it to prevent it from escalating into anger that can have negative consequences. As mentioned in the "Spotlight" article, Ken has created written strategies to use at home and at his volunteer workplace. It is satisfying to be able to *see* the strategies and realize their effectiveness.

Our staff, too, have been thinking creatively about how to assist our clients with problems they encounter—especially the problems that are common after a brain injury, such as social isolation. Megan Dissinger, B.A., CBIS and April Moser, B.S., two of our neurorehabilitation specialists in Berks County, Pennsylvania, have just created a new group called "Out and About" that will meet monthly. The first dinner meeting will be held in

April 2011 (when the weather is more conducive to community outings). We will keep you apprised of this group, and another group to be facilitated by April Moser, B.S. and Keila Rodriguez, B.S., for adolescents and young adults (ages 16 to 21) with cognitive impairments. This group will focus on social skills and provide opportunities for development of communication skills.

Our staff are also in the process of compiling a handbook of customized, personalized compensatory strategies for a variety of situations. This handbook should be completed during the summer of 2011, and we envision future supplements to it, as well. There is an abundance of creativity in the handbook, and we look forward to sharing it with you.

A common misconception about creativity is that it must be an unstructured process. People who believe that may assume that individuals with cognitive impairments who benefit from structured routines will not be able to be creative. In reality, having structure in place can actually make it possible to express oneself in creative ways. Within structure, there are many opportunities for creative expression, and we encourage you to consider the opportunities for your personal satisfaction and enjoyment.

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Update

- Welcome to our new clients—Brendan, Carl, Cheryl, Dawn, Deborah, Dustin, Elizabeth, Ellen, Flavio, Jeanne, Keith, Linda, Thomas, Vincent, Will and William—our new neurorehabilitation specialists, Charlise Hendrix, B.S., Tiffany Jones, B.A., Keila Rodriguez, B.S., and Kimberly Schlaline, M.S.W.—and our new part-time publication assistant, Andrienne Freeland, M.A.

Our clients and staff continue to be involved in many interesting, varied activities. As usual, in each issue we mention some of them; more will be mentioned in the next issue of *BrainWaves*.

- Mike L. is volunteering at a Habitat for Humanity ReStore, a railroad museum, and his church. Good work, Mike!!
- Tom C. registered to take a class in German at a local college. He started the class on January 25th; it is held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.
- Reenie has been researching the flower *Statice*, for a presentation at the garden club of which she has been an active member for quite some time.
- Kim is continuing to volunteer at Greensleeves (run by Allies, Inc.) and at the Alliance for the Disabled in Action (ADA).
- Ken continues to play the guitar and his mother plays the flute; with other members of their church, they play their instruments for residents at a local nursing home, once a month.

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Spotlight: Ken Loffer



Ken in the staff records room at the hospital where he volunteers.

Spotlight: Ken, tell us a little about yourself.

Ken: I am 49 years old and have a master's degree in electrical engineering. I grew up in a musically-inclined family and I like to play the guitar. I also sang in a barbershop quartet for about five years when I was younger. My hobbies include building and repairing electronic equipment, such as electronic music gear and synthesizers. I also like to play computer games and write computer programs to solve puzzles in the newspaper. I am also an active member in my church where I play my guitar along with the congregational hymn singing.

Spotlight: Tell us a little about yourself prior to your injury.

Ken: I was married and worked as an electronics engineer for about 20 years for the Army at Fort Monmouth, NJ. In 1991, I was awarded the Research and Development Achievement Award for creating a software modification that improved radio communications among the soldiers when in the field. I also owned my own house and, at the time of my injury, it was almost paid off.

Spotlight: When was your injury?

Ken: I am not positive of the date and I will need to ask my mother to join us to help out with dates and details. My memory is not so good for those details immediately following the accident.

Dorothy (Dottie) Loffer, Ken's mother: Ken's accident was on August 13, 1998. He was involved in a severe car accident. He was a passenger in a car that was struck by a dump truck. The truck was overloaded with asphalt and ran a red light.

Spotlight: Where did you receive medical services?

Ken: I was told I was airlifted to Jersey Shore Medical Center in Neptune, NJ, but I do not recall any details.

Dottie: When he arrived at Jersey Shore Medical Center, Ken was in a coma, at a Glasgow Coma Scale score of three. He remained in a coma for about three weeks. Ken's sister (Karen McLaren) visited him with friends of his from his church and they sang hymns to help "wake" him from the coma. During one visit, his sister even put a guitar in Ken's hands and he was

able to play a few recognizable chords, which the medical staff found to be encouraging.

Ken: I also have a tracheotomy scar (he pointed to his neck) and a scar from my feeding tube.

Dottie: When he was finally stable enough and had emerged enough from his coma, Ken was transferred to JFK Medical Center in Edison, NJ. He was still healing from a broken hip and pneumonia. About six weeks after the transfer, the hip was healed enough for him to start bearing weight. He began to participate in rehabilitation therapies. One time, one of his therapists told me that, when working with Ken, they were asking him to hold up one finger for "yes" and two fingers for "no" because he was unable to speak due to his tracheotomy tube. The therapist stated that Ken was doing well answering simple questions and then suddenly held up three fingers; the therapists were confused. The therapist said they could kind of understand Ken, who was able to briefly whisper past his tracheotomy tube, and he said he "just wanted to see if he could throw them off." In about six more weeks, Ken was transferred to JFK's Extended Recovery Unit at Hartwyck at Oaktree in Edison, NJ, because of the progress he was making. There, he received speech therapy, physical therapy, recreational therapy and occupational therapy.

Ken: I remember when I arrived at Hartwyck, the therapists made signs [which he still has] to help me remember why I was there and which therapy I was receiving from which therapist.

Dottie: Ken was discharged from Hartwyck in January 1999. He then received outpatient services at Health-South in Brick, NJ, not far from his home. There he received occupational therapy and physical therapy. He also participated in some brief vocational rehabilitation in June 1999 where he was assembling things.

However, he stated that he did not care for that type of work. So I spoke with his former employer at Fort Monmouth who agreed to have Ken return there and volunteer. Prior to beginning his volunteer position, he completed his paperwork for disability retirement. In November 1999, Ken returned to Fort Monmouth as a technical program volunteer in the Antennas and Spectrum Analysis Program. He volunteered three times per week for about four hours each time. Unfortunately, because of the security protocol there, no job coach was able to accompany him.

Ken: I also obtained a Recognition Award for Service Completion for the dates from September 1983 until September 2005. My volunteer work involved providing direct contributions to ongoing projects and I was able to transfer some of my experience to newer employees with less experience.

Spotlight: When did you move to Pennsylvania and who is your support system now?

Ken: Over time, my marriage deteriorated and ended in divorce. As a result, in March 2008 I moved in with my mother who lives in Pennsylvania. She is my main support system, as well as friends at my church who provide me with transportation when necessary. I also go out to eat with them on occasion. Although my sisters live in neighboring states (New Jersey and Maryland), they provide “long distance” support. Plus, I have five nieces and one nephew who I see fairly often.

Spotlight: How long have you been receiving services through Community Skills Program?

Dottie: At the recommendation of Barbara Scheffel, B.S., RN, CRRN, CCM, who was assisting with life-care planning at the time, Ken began participating in Community Skills Program in February 2002.

Spotlight: When you relocated to Pennsylvania in March 2008, how did that affect your volunteering and pattern of routines?

Ken: Well, I stopped working at Fort Monmouth because of the distance I

would have to travel. After I started living in Pennsylvania, I initially began volunteering at the Bucks County Free Library in Doylestown, with my mother, but that was only for a short time. Then I had an opportunity to volunteer at Doylestown Hospital. The volunteer department staff figured out that, with my experience, I could help out with filing papers in the human resource department. It is a good fit for me because I am detail-oriented and task-oriented. My supervisor, Terry Miller, gave me instructions on how to file documents in the staff records room. I have been volunteering there for a little over two years.

Spotlight: You mentioned “your experience.” What did you mean by that?

Ken: Prior to my injury, I was very organized and I used datebooks and schedules to help me remember appointments, and my digital watch to know the time and date. These tools were very useful to me then and are even more useful to me now. In addition, due to my work experience at Fort Monmouth, I am very “security aware” and appreciate the need to keep my work with the staff records confidential.

Spotlight: What type of strategies do you use to do your volunteer work?

Ken: I use written instructions that we [referring to Carol Bardsley, M.A., CPCRT, CBIS, his neurorehabilitation specialist with Community Skills Program who conducted this interview] initially developed to help me do everything for the beginning and end of my volunteering day. I have a sheet entitled “Things To Do When Entering Records Room For The Day” and a sheet entitled “Things To Do Before Leaving Records Room For The Day.” I also have filing instructions that Terry initially gave me verbally. I typed it up on my computer and made the information into charts that provide me with reminders of what documents go where in the files. Terry gave me permission to hang the charts in the staff records room. She liked them so much that she even asked if she could use them to train some of the summer interns.

Spotlight: That is great!!!! You also mentioned that you only volunteered at the library for a short time. Why did you stop volunteering there?

Ken: I was bored at the library because there was not enough work that held my interest and the tasks were not consistent. I did like re-shelving the books, but that task was not always available to me. I decided I wanted to focus only on the volunteer work at the hospital. I enjoy doing the work and interacting with the staff.

Spotlight: Tell us a little bit more about your volunteering at the hospital.

Ken: At first, you came with me. I got my ride with Bucks County Transport to the hospital and I would meet you in the vending room to have my morning snack. Then I found out that volunteers were entitled to a \$7.00 per day expense account to be spent at the snack bar or cafeteria. So I started going to the snack bar (where I have become a regular!). I bring a travel mug that the snack bar staff fills with coffee for me.

Spotlight: How long have you been volunteering independently and how often do you volunteer?

Ken: I have been volunteering independently since September 2009. I volunteer two days per week for about two hours each day. Because of fatigue issues as a result of my brain injury, I am not able to work much longer than that without taking a nap, which is what I usually do when I get home, after I eat lunch. In addition to taking medication, I also need to drink coffee periodically during my shift, which is why the travel mug is helpful. Terry gave me permission to use the travel mug in the records room because it is spill-proof.

Spotlight: What have you learned in your nine years with Community Skills Program?

Ken: I have learned that, even after my injury, I haven’t lost near the number of abilities that I initially thought I had lost. The staff from

(continued on page 4)

Spotlight continued (from page 3)

Community Skills Program has helped me learn to work around difficulties and to develop solutions/strategies to be able to do tasks that I wanted to do but was having trouble doing as a result of my brain injury.

Spotlight: Can you give us an example of a strategy you learned?

Ken: One of the tasks I do is to periodically clean the bathroom I use, to help out around the house. One time as you and I were cleaning the bathroom, I kept a clipboard, pen and paper and wrote down the instructions step-by-step as we performed the task. Then I took the paper to my computer and I typed the instructions in a clear and formatted manner. I then put them in a large plastic bag to keep the instructions dry as I was cleaning the bathroom. Now each time I clean the bathroom, I have instructions to guide me.

Spotlight: What other medical or rehabilitation services do you receive?

Ken: I see Yan Qi, M.D., neurologist, every six months for follow-up. She is the doctor who prescribes my medications. I also see Vincent Vicci, O.D., neuro-optometrist, one time per year. He prescribes the strength of the prisms in my eyeglasses because I have problems with double vision as a result of the accident. I also participate in the Therapeutic Activities Group facilitated by James J. Stone, Psy.D., neuropsychologist, and you, which meets every Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at The Center for Neuropsychology and Counseling, P.C., in Warrington, PA.

Spotlight: What do you do in the group and how does the group help you?

Ken: The encouragement from the other people's progress is very helpful. During each session, we review each person's weekend activities and then,

at the end of the session, we review plans each person has for the upcoming weekend activities. We also do a cognitive activity and we take turns presenting a current events article to help people keep aware of significant happenings in our world. We have alternating plans for lunches, depending on the Thursday of the month. The first Thursday we eat out, the second Thursday we order in, the third and fourth Thursdays we "brown bag it." When there is a fifth Thursday, it is a "wild card" and the members have to come to a rational consensus about what we will do for lunch that day.

Spotlight: Do you enjoy the group?

Ken: Yes!!

Spotlight: Why?

Ken: I like the participants in the group. It helps me "break out of my shell," in a manner of speaking.

Spotlight: Do you have any words of advice for those recovering from traumatic brain injury?

Ken: If you have a hard time doing what you are trying to do, ask for help and maybe adjust your methods a bit. You can't expect that everything will be as easy as it used to be.

* * * * *

[Editor's Note: We certainly appreciate the high quality of the rehabilitation services provided to Ken before he was referred to Community Skills Program, as he was already on the road to a good recovery. We also appreciate Ms. Scheffel's experience and insights when doing Ken's life care plan. Most of all, Ken's mother and Ken have been a great team and it is a pleasure to work with them. They have both been resourceful in identifying Ken's post-acute rehabilitation activities and options and committed to the progress Ken has made.]

Upcoming Events

- The American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine will be holding its mid-year meeting at the Westin Chicago River North in Chicago, IL, April 28 to May 1, 2011. The mid-year meeting will be attended by members of the Brain Injury Inter-disciplinary Special Interest Group, Outcome Measurement Networking Group, Spinal Cord Injury Special Interest Group, and Stroke Networking Group. For information, visit www.acrm.org.
- The 2011 Annual Seminar of the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, Inc. entitled, *Discovering Success: From Trauma to Community*, will be held on May 19–20, 2011 at the Sheraton Eatontown Hotel and Conference Center in Eatontown, NJ. For more information, call Joanna Boyd at (732) 745-0200 or go to www.bianj.org.
- The National Brain Injury Employment Conference will be held in Denver, CO, May 24–25, 2011. This conference is viewed as a forum for clinicians, researchers, and consumers to exchange ideas and information regarding employment options after brain injury. For information, visit www.ctat-training.com.
- The Federal Interagency Conference on Traumatic Brain Injury will be held in Washington, DC, June 13–15, 2011. For information, visit www.tbi-interagency-conference.org.
- The 2011 Annual Conference of the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania, Inc. entitled, *Critical Insights, Strategies and Alternatives in Brain Injury*, will be held on June 27–28, 2011 at the Lancaster Marriott and Convention Center in Lancaster, PA. For more information, you can visit www.biapa.org.
- The Annual Conference of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine (ACRM) and the American Society of Neurorehabilitation (ASNR) will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta, GA, October 11–15, 2011. For information, please visit www.acrm.org.

Creativity Corner

Creativity

by Andrew Matushewsky
(client of Community Skills Program)

Creativity has always been something I have tried to express throughout my life. Looking back through the years, it was not until after my stroke, in 1998 at the age of 18, that I realized the potential of my creativity and how it would impact my life.

From 1998 to 2003, I attended Raritan Valley Community College, studying graphic design and film. I was unable to complete my associate's degree due to health issues resulting from my stroke and diagnosis of epilepsy.

After leaving college, I decided to pursue video production on my own. Through the years, I worked on various video projects for family members and friends. I worked on everything from digital art to video editing and DVD authoring.

In 2006, I moved from New Jersey to Berks County, Pennsylvania. I soon found myself struggling with problems concentrating and staying focused on my video production work, as well as memory loss. I decided to step away from video production and try to search for new ways to express my creativity. I began exploring various forms of art, including photography, culinary arts and fine arts. Because of my father's experience as an art teacher, he suggested I try painting. With his knowledge and art supplies on hand, it helped me transition into this art medium.

My most recent endeavor began in spring of 2010. I was approached by a friend to make a custom family crest. After much thought and research, I found that many crests are made of wood, so I decided to try my hand at carving. I then realized this was a new art medium to continue pursuing.

I am currently working on multiple acrylic and oil paintings and a home movie DVD. I am hoping in the near future to turn my passion for art into more than just a hobby. If you are interested in the arts or would like more information, you can contact me at amatushewsky@gmail.com or by phone at (610) 927-7665.



This is the family crest I was asked to carve. It is a relief carving that, once carved, was painted and then later darkened with an "antiquing" technique. I like the look because it gives the carving an older look and subdues the color of the paint.



The name of this painting is "Cinema One" and it was my first acrylic painting that I completed. I chose the subject of a movie theater because I have always had a love for classic cinema and movies.



"Yellow Daisies" is one of my most recent paintings that I have completed. I find myself painting a lot of still lifes because it is a calming practice for me. This was my first painting that I sold.

Creativity Corner (continued)

The Benefits of Playing Chess

by Patrick Williams
(former client of Community Skills Program)

I have often enjoyed articles in *BrainWaves* from Community Skills Program clients, particularly those of a human interest nature.

It has been about five years, or thereabouts, since I was a client of Community Skills Program and I thought I would share with *BrainWaves*' readers some information concerning a form of "therapy" which I have found helpful. It may be of some value and interest.

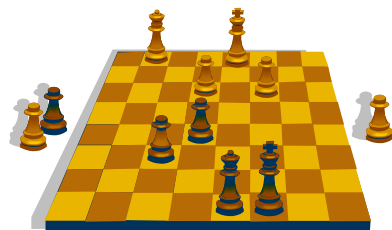
I sustained my brain injury as a pedestrian in an auto accident in 1984, some 27 years ago. I developed a seizure disorder as a consequence and have received much of my medical treatment from New York University in New York City. Fortunately, I have had far fewer seizures in the past two years and I carefully try to use a variety of strategies to limit the seizures from affecting my life.

Over the past year, I developed an interest in playing chess, as a form of mental stimulation and concentration. I have found playing chess on my computer to be an enjoyable way of challenging my attention and concentration. During a recent cognitive remediation session with my current facilitator, V. Gerard Alberigi, LSW, LPC, we found the results of researching chess as a form of cognitive rehabilitation therapy to be interesting. Our research indicated that chess has been used as a form of therapy for patients with a variety of conditions of a cognitive or other mental nature.

ChessCorps.Org, Brookline, Massachusetts, is an organization which has used chess as a form of rehabilitation therapy with a variety of patients. One can obtain further information from their website (info@chesscorps.org) or by phone (617/879-9997). This website indicates that playing chess can lead to improvement in cognitive functioning. My particular brain injury has left me with word-finding challenges [my facilitator helped me write this article], but my concentration is much better with things I can see/visualize. That's one reason why chess has been a good tool for me to use to improve my attention, concentration and memory. Other websites have documented the playing of chess to reduce anxiety and raise self-esteem, which I have found to be true in my case.

If any *BrainWaves*' readers are interested in contacting me, I am available at prw6@msn.com or by phone at (570) 346-8147.

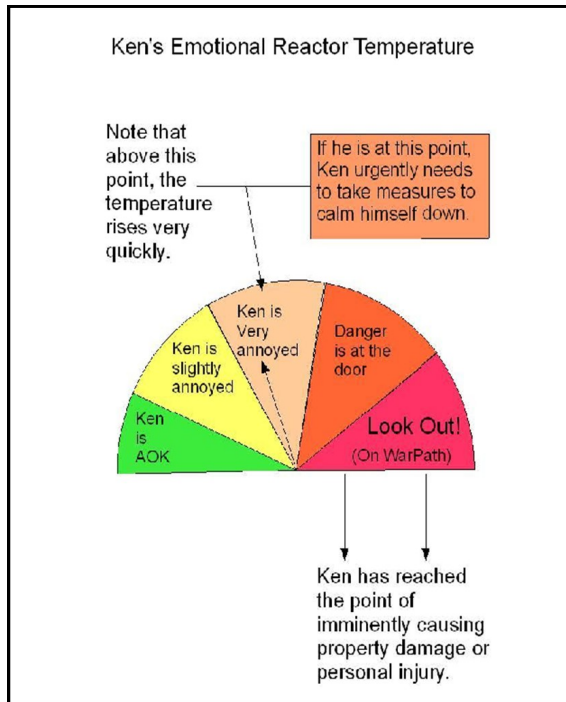
[Note: I wish to give special thanks to Myra Ungrady, RN, CCM, case manager, Harleysville Insurance Company, for all her support in my rehabilitation since my brain injury. Best wishes also to Community Skills Program and thank you for *BrainWaves*!]



Update continued (from page 1)

- John S. continues to enjoy his participation in activities at Messiah Village on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and his volunteer work at New Hope Ministries on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- Brian continues to volunteer, walking dogs, at a local animal shelter, one or two days per week for about three hours each time. He is also exploring other volunteer activities, and services through the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.
- Tom S. recently volunteered at a local food pantry in addition to volunteering where he previously worked. He also attends a therapeutic horseback riding program twice a week, exercises twice a week at a fitness center, and takes Tai Chi classes there on Sunday mornings as well.
- Adam continues to volunteer at the American Cancer Society and, recently, at Junior Achievement. He works out at Body Zone with a personal trainer and also independently. He recently went with a friend to a Reading Royals hockey game.
- Yvonne and her neurorehabilitation specialist took a class called "Drawing Composition" on Tuesday afternoons at Fleisher Art Memorial. They also went to a number of art exhibits.
- Anju is enhancing her clerical skills while volunteering at the Alliance for the Disabled in Action (ADA). She is also exercising at Planet Fitness, and goes to the local public library where she uses the computer and also takes out books. She continues to enjoy crocheting, too.
- Kirk has begun working on a model of an 18th century sailing vessel, which he hopes to complete and display at the *2011 Creativity Expo*.

Creativity Corner (cont'd)



Editor's Note: Ken created this visual cue as a strategy to manage his emotions when he becomes annoyed.

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BrainWaves

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*Serving individuals with brain injuries in
New Jersey and Pennsylvania.*

*Editor's Note: We apologize for the very late distribution of this issue of **BrainWaves**. We are very aware of how indispensable to us our publication assistant, Lisa Sechrist, is. We are thrilled she is now back at work after four months of medical leave for two back surgeries and recuperation. Welcome back, Lisa!!*
