
◆ Brain Waves ◆

Once More with Feeling...Fear

Our Vocational Adjustment Group meets every Tuesday in Philadelphia, PA and discusses either a predetermined topic, or an issue raised by a group member that has significance for work performance or preparation for work and community living.

During consecutive group sessions for a period of several weeks, just prior to the writing of this article, attention was devoted to Jennifer's fear of attending the Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program in Johnstown, PA, approximately 300 miles from her home. In their attempt to encourage Jennifer's attendance, the group members discussed the emotion of fear. It was the consensus of the group that everyone has fears.

Stewart, without cuing, pulled out his pocket notebook and proceeded to read the definition of fear. He referenced *Webster's Dictionary* and stated that fear is "a feeling of alarm, disquiet caused by a deeper pain; to be frightened; feelings of disaster or terror." Jennifer stated that those words describe her feelings regarding her possible attendance at the Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program in Johnstown, PA.

Each member openly discussed his/her fears. They listened to each other and offered possible ways to overcome the fears. Howard expressed a fear about who his next supervisor at work will be. As discussed in prior sessions, Howard explained that his supervisor, the head chef at the hotel where he works, resigned and relocated to Wyoming. He said he liked him as a supervisor and that they got along very well. He said he is afraid that the person replacing the head chef may not be as good a person to work for, and

that may cause difficulties for him at work. Howard further stated that, even though he is afraid, he will continue to go to work and perform his job duties to the best of his abilities. He looked at Jennifer and said, "Because I am afraid of this, I won't stop going to work and trying to do a good job."

Howard also said he is most fearful, however, of being mugged at gunpoint. He described an incident which he said happened in 1989—after leaving volunteer work at Chestnut Hill Hospital one night and waiting for the bus to go home, he was mugged at gunpoint by two young men. All members were sympathetic to Howard's expressions and offered suggestions as to how to overcome that fear. Sam suggested that, when at all possible, Howard walk to the bus stop with at least one other person, or preferably with a group. Howard was receptive and said, "There is safety in numbers."

Stewart reflected for a moment and shared his experience of fear when working on trying to improve his eye hand coordination. He said he and his

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Update

- Welcome to our new clients—Andrew, Bob, Carol, Chris, Frank, Kelly, Lawrence, Paula, Richelle, Steven H., Sylvester, Tara B. and Thom—and our new neurorehabilitation specialists—Joseph Nester, M.A., M.Ed., Casey Rech, B.S. (who is rejoining our staff), Gillian Rosenbaum, B.A., and Terese (Teri) Van Solkema-Waitz, B.S.

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*.

- José has been improving his cognitive abilities while working on home improvement projects. He has been installing molding, and spackling and painting in the dining room, and is making plans to "hide" the hot water heater pipes in one corner of the dining room and restore the hardwood floor. He has been doing a beautiful job on his home improvement projects.
- Abner has been expanding his activities at his church and has even been leading some Bible study groups. He and his wife also signed up to take an English as a Second Language (ESL) class at their local library; the class is free.
- Reggie has added a third day of volunteer work at a local hospital. He independently keeps a tally of the number of labels he applies to supplies. He has also been doing household tasks. In his leisure time, he works on Sudoku and crossword puzzles, and listens to music.

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Once More with Feeling... continued (from page 1)

mother were practicing exercises designed to improve his eye-hand coordination. He described the exercise as tossing a large ball back and forth. He said he needed to keep his eye on the ball and catch it when thrown to him. He explained that he was not only afraid of dropping the ball, but also afraid that, if he missed the ball, it would hit him in the face. He said he continued to try, and even practiced by tossing the ball up in the air and trying to catch it. He explained that, while he knew he needed to practice these exercises, he was afraid of not only injuring himself, but also afraid of failure. He said he kept trying, eventually overcame his fears, and ultimately improved his eye-hand coordination.

Jennifer said that, in addition to her fears of being so far away from home and not knowing anyone at the Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program, she is also afraid of failure. She said she is fearful she will not make it in the program and ultimately not reach her goal of living independently.

Stewart relayed his experience of working and living on a dairy farm in Oxford, PA. He said it was the first time he was away from home for an extended period of time and he cried when his parents dropped him off. He explained that, although he was homesick initially, he grew to like the place and gained valuable knowledge and work experience.

Sam described a fear of reverting back to the way he used to be—"confused, and lacking direction and focus." He said, "It is a struggle every day to stay on track." He described an experience with a former employer as "a bitter experience." He said he is very angry about the way he was treated there, and

that the total experience has left a "sour taste" in his mouth. He said he is afraid of becoming so angry that his feelings will carry over to his new place of employment. He said he is afraid that he has become so disillusioned that he will not want to work at all. He reiterated that it is a struggle to go to work every day. He looked at Jennifer and said, "Even though it is a struggle, I have to do it."

Stewart shared an experience he had several years ago. He said he spent the summer at State College (Penn State University) for intensive speech therapy. He said he was a long way from home and, like Jennifer, did not know anyone there. He said he knew he needed to improve his speech and wanted to be successful in therapy. He said he attended the program, staying in the dormitory with a roommate for the entire summer, and grew to really like it. He told Jennifer directly, "It was worth it." He said, "If you don't try, you will never know what could have been." Sam and Howard echoed Stewart's sentiments and encouraged Jennifer to try the Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program. Sam added that fear is something we all experience and that, if we are true to ourselves, we have to admit that all of us, at some point, have feared failure.

The discussions related to the topic of fear were enlightening and encouraging to all the members. As Sam stated, fear is something we all experience and, at some point, we have all feared failure. The group agreed that you must try to overcome your fears. Sam insightfully stated, "Even if you try something and fail, it's okay; you can learn from your experiences."

[Editor's Note: Thanks to Lisa Miller, B.A., CBIS who has been facilitating the Vocational Adjustment Group for Ray Finley, Ph.D. who is receiving physical therapy for a broken ankle.]

Upcoming Events— Save the Dates!

- The 2008 Annual Seminar of the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, Inc. (BIANJ), **Reconnecting Mind and Body**, will be held on Wednesday and Thursday, May 14-15, 2008 at the Sheraton Eatontown Hotel and Conference Center in Eatontown, NJ. For more information, contact BIANJ at (732) 738-1002 or visit their website at www.bianj.org.
- The 2008 Williamsburg Conference will be held Thursday and Friday, June 5-6, 2008 at the Williamsburg Hospitality House Hotel and Conference Center in Williamsburg, VA. This year's conference, entitled **Rehabilitation of the Adult and Child with Brain Injury: Practical Solutions to Real World Problems**, is presented by Brain Injury Services, Inc., the National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury, and Virginia Commonwealth University Traumatic Brain Injury Model System. Practical solutions to major problems after brain injury in three core areas will be emphasized: 1) community integration, life skills rehabilitation, and long term needs; 2) cognitive, behavioral, psychosocial, and vocational rehabilitation; and 3) pediatric brain injury and academic reentry. For more information, contact Linda Lee at (703) 451-8881 or e-mail her at llee@braininjurysvcs.org. You can obtain a copy of the 2008 Registration Brochure by accessing the website, www.braininjurysvcs.org, and clicking on "News and Events."
- The 2008 Annual Conference of the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania, Inc. (BIAPA) will be held Monday and Tuesday, June 23-24, 2008 in Harrisburg, PA. More information will be provided in our next issue of **BrainWaves** or you can visit the BIAPA website, www.biapa.org, in the coming months.

Spotlight: Tara Sutton



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Spotlight: Tell us about yourself.

Tara: I'm 26. This is really hard for someone with a brain injury....to answer questions....Well, I was in a car accident in May of 2005. I got knocked unconscious, but I wasn't in a coma. I was in two other accidents before that. My first car accident was when I was 17. That was a bigger one. I think I was in a coma after that one, for about a week.

Spotlight: In what hospital were you after the first accident?

Tara: Cooper Hospital in Camden, NJ. After my first accident, I had to re-learn how to walk, speak, read, and use the bathroom.

Spotlight: Where did you go to re-learn how to do everything after your first accident?

Tara: I think that was at Jefferson Rehab in Voorhees, NJ.

Spotlight: Were you still in school?

Tara: I was a senior in high school at the time.

Spotlight: Did you graduate?

Tara: I went back to school in a wheelchair and graduated, and did a few years of physical therapy...about two years, I guess.

Spotlight: Where did you go to physical therapy?

Tara: I think Bayshore. Something like that.

Spotlight: Where is that located?

Tara: I think it's in Bridgeton.

Spotlight: What happened after that?

Tara: I went through neuropsychological tests and evaluations....I can't think of the doctor's name...he was in Cherry Hill.

Spotlight: What happened as a result of the pain and injury to your leg from the accident? Tell me about that.

Tara: Well, I got addicted to my pain medication. I was on it for a long time...about three years. I am now in recovery through a 12-step program. I attend two to three meetings per week for that.

Spotlight: How did you learn about Community Skills Program?

Tara: Ummm....how did I? My doctor, Dr. Rubin, and Margo Brooks, his nurse, referred me to Community Skills Program.

Spotlight: What was the name of your first neurorehabilitation therapist?

Tara: Clara.

Spotlight: How did you do?

Tara: I was doing pretty good. I was volunteering through the animal shelter, and then I got hired by them.

Spotlight: How did you first get that position at the shelter?

Tara: Through Community Skills Program. And then, about a year later I guess, I was doing well but got into another car accident on October 23, 2004. It was a hit and run and I hit my head on the window. Then I had a hard time keeping up with appointments and I started forgetting stuff and things were building up and then, in May

2005, I got into another car accident and then things got worse. I had been seeing Dr. Rubin the whole time...I was on all sorts of medication, but it still wasn't helping me get everything together. Dr. Rubin brought up looking into Community Skills Program again.

Spotlight: Through all of that, you bought a house. How did you do that?

Tara: I had some cognitive rehabilitation therapy through Community Skills Program with Clara, and then I took some classes at Delaware County Community College on how to buy a house. Right now, I live in a townhouse that I bought.

Spotlight: How long have you lived in your house?

Tara: I moved in on my 22nd birthday.

Spotlight: You said you started with Community Skills Program again. What have you learned this time around?

Tara: I started back with Community Skills Program in the Spring last year, I think. With you, Dianne. [Tara is referring to her current neurorehabilitation specialist with Community Skills Program, Dianne Marchese, B.S., CBIS, who conducted this interview.] I learned how to organize my personal stuff into groups instead of just in drawers and all over the place. I learned to write things down so I can remember more. Oh yeah, and to get rid of visual clutter. I learned the importance of keeping a regular schedule; every time I don't do that, I start to become brain-dead. Oh, and I learned more about my brain injury, like what the problems are, why they are there, what to expect, and how to deal with them.

Spotlight: Can you give me an example?

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Spotlight continued (from page 3)

Tara: Like, when I'm interrupted, I'd get frustrated. I used to think that I was stupid, but now I know my brain is trying to take in all this information and it can only take in one thing at a time sometimes. That's why sometimes I completely shut down, like when there are five people talking to me at the same time. I need to stop and take a break or tell who is talking to me that I need a break right now and will come back to it later.

Spotlight: You said you worked at an animal shelter.

Tara: I was working at the front desk for a while, doing customer service—counseling them on the cats they were adopting.

Spotlight: Is that where you got all of your pets?

Tara: I got a couple from the shelter, some from friends, and a couple from pet shops.

Spotlight: How many pets do you have?

Tara: I have two dogs and 11 cats.

Spotlight: That's a lot.

Tara: Well, I really got them because I wanted to see how they all acted with each other. I wanted to see what kinds of problems (like fighting) they would have living with each other, because then I would know by experience what problems people can have when they adopt animals. That way I could tell them what to expect and would know how to help them with their problems.

Spotlight: You must spend a lot of time taking care of them.

Tara: I have a lot of litter boxes and I do go through a lot of food and litter, but it's good. I vacuum a lot, too, but it doesn't really take too much time. I have it as part of my routine now. I walk the dogs when I get up and then a

couple of times during the day and I scoop the litter every day.

Spotlight: What happened to your job at the shelter?

Tara: I was starting to get confused. Things got too hard to do because of my brain injury. I really felt like I needed to get myself together.

Spotlight: Are you able to work now?

Tara: I do some clerical stuff for a business a friend has, but I want to get a real job some day.

Spotlight: What do you mean by a "real job?"

Tara: One that I have to go to regularly, on a steady schedule. I'm not sure what kind of job that would be, though.

Spotlight: How has your life changed over the past year?

Tara: I used to not be able to complete regular tasks, I guess.

Spotlight: Like what?

Tara: Things that I now take for granted, like waking up and taking a shower. I used to be overwhelmed about the thought of doing things because I had no concept of time and how long these everyday things took.

Spotlight: What else?

Tara: I have cleared room in my head and can see myself doing things that I never thought I would have been able to do—like one day getting a real job. A big thing is I started to throw away things I don't need or haven't used in years, like old stuffed animals in the attic, years of old paperwork, and broken aquarium stuff. I kept a lot of junk for a long time. I've also been addressing many financial issues that I avoided after my accident. Getting all of that done and out of the way cleared my head. I can also do a couple of different things at the same time now, like cook and wash the dishes. I couldn't do that before because it was too much to think about at the same time.

Spotlight: How is it that you've been able to learn these things?

Tara: I set up my bills online so I can pay them on time once a month and I try not to let things go too long without being done.

Spotlight: How do you remember things?

Tara: I write things down in a single notebook (I use only one now) so that I don't have multiple lists getting lost around my house. I use a calendar and a planner to keep track of appointments, too. On my own, I started coming up with some ways to help me remember things, like setting reminders on my cellphone for appointments and important things to do, like cancel reservations; in the past, I would forget and get charged for not canceling them. I put people's birthdays in my cellphone.

Spotlight: What about your daily routine?

Tara: I have been slowly adding new things into my routine. I wait until I am used to doing something before I add a new one, like going to the gym and exercising.

Spotlight: How about getting things done around your house?

Tara: I used to take on too many things at the same time and not get anything done. By learning to do one project at a time, I have been fixing up my house, too.

Spotlight: Do you have any plans for your future?

Tara: I want to go back to school.

Spotlight: What would you like to go back to school for?

Tara: I don't know for what subject yet, but I know I need to start with some basic classes, like math and English.

Spotlight: Why do you want to go back to school?

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Spotlight continued (from page 4)

Tara: I'd like to get a regular job with a steady schedule. I feel better when my schedule is the same, or when I have a reason to get out of bed.

Spotlight: What are you working on now?

Tara: Right now I'm working on keeping up with all of the things I have learned and have made a part of my life.

Spotlight: What advice would you give someone else recovering from a brain injury?

Tara: Be patient, have an open mind throughout the whole process, and keep going. Sometimes you don't see the results of working on yourself right away. Don't be critical of yourself—give yourself a break. I don't expect too much, so that I can appreciate the small amounts of growth that keep me motivated.

[Editor's Note: We appreciate the fine care provided to Tara by Dr. Rubin and Ms. Brooks, and their awareness of her need for community-based services. We also appreciate the support of Tara's rehabilitation efforts that has been provided by State Farm Insurance Company.]



Here's Tara with one of her pet dogs—a Chihuahua named Monkey.

Update continued (from page 1)

- Robert D. is the vice present of the local Parent Teacher Organization at his daughter's school and serves on several committees as well.
- Beth continues to perform her part time job at Genuardi's very well, and is looking for other employment to supplement her part-time job at Genuardi's since they do not need her to work more hours there.
- Stephen has been volunteering at a local food bank and exercising at his YMCA.
- Lori began working as a full-time counselor at an agency specializing in drug and alcohol treatment, and is doing a great job of handling her work responsibilities and the parenting responsibilities for her one-year-old son.
- Kristin attended a Peer Support and Advocacy meeting at a nearby Center for Independent Living (CIL). There were two outside speakers and the group then brainstormed ideas to increase socialization opportunities.
- Lorine continues to be an active participant at the local Jewish Community Center. She recently attended lectures on "Synagogues of the USA" and "Nosh of Knowledge: Terror." She also recently watched a video called *Great Gardens of the World* and researched "Aloe" for her report to the Terra Nova Garden Club.
- Dan is continuing to work part-time in the bakery department at Wegmans. He was successful in his persistent requests for a set, rather than a fluctuating, schedule. He also continues to volunteer as an usher at a theatre and at his local library where he shelves books. In addition, he has registered for three courses of interest and self-improvement. He is a busy person!
- Steven O. began using a digital camera to take photographs and a software program to edit them. He is also taking a History of Drama course at a local college; he is accompanied by his neurorehabilitation specialist.
- Cara is taking a creative non-fiction course that meets one evening a week.
- Corinne has been volunteering at a coffee shop and at a therapeutic horseback riding stable.
- Phil achieved his personal goal of self-publishing a book of his photography (which was featured in our last issue of *BrainWaves*) and held a book-signing reception at a restaurant near his home in the South Jersey Shore area.
- Barry continues to work out once or twice a week at LA Fitness Sports Club. He has been lifting weights to increase his upper body strength and has noticed that he has more stamina when ambulating with his walker.
- Howard B. will be going to Florida on vacation in March and has also accepted a friend's invitation to be the best man at his friend's wedding in August 2008.
- Rafael has been doing some very nice woodworking projects. He made a caddy to hold his flatware in a vertical position, and two coffee mugs.
- Bruce went to a horse sale in northern New Jersey in January, to stay involved with the horse racing industry. Prior to his stroke, he was a blood stock agent and traded trotters and pacers. His work required international as well as domestic travel.
- Our congratulations to Dianne Marchese, B.S., CBIS, one of our neurorehabilitation specialists who recently took and passed the exam to become a certified brain injury specialist.

Creativity Corner

As many, if not most, of our readers know, cognitive difficulties following a brain injury can make it hard to remember and keep track of important information. Our staff and clients use their creativity to develop compensatory strategies for our clients that will enable them to be successful in performing daily living tasks. Since many of our clients pursue volunteer work to enhance the quality of their lives and/or to develop work skills, we thought you might like to see the **Volunteer Job Tracking Sheet** developed by one of our neurorehabilitation specialists to aid in a client's search for a volunteer job. We also thought you might like to see the **Paratransit Reservation Form**, for transportation planning; it is on page 7. It is used to plan for making the phone call to place the reservation, and to record the information for later reference. Please feel free to use or modify these forms for your purposes.

Name: _____

Date: _____

VOLUNTEER JOB TRACKING SHEET

Name of Company:

Address:

Telephone #: ()

Fax #: ()

Name of Contact Person:

Job Title of Contact Person:

Volunteer Position Applied for:

Application Completed?: Circle: YES or NO

If yes, date completed:

Interviewed? Circle: YES or NO

If yes, date of interview:

Interviewer's name:

Action steps to be taken:

SAMPLE TELEPHONE SCRIPT:
PARATRANSIT RESERVATION FORM
1-800-123-4567

Hello, my name is John Doe.

My passenger ID number is 12345.

I would appreciate a ride on (date) _____
at (time) _____.

I would like to be picked up at:
(address) _____.

The nearest cross street is
_____.

I would appreciate a ride to
_____.

The nearest cross street is
_____.

I would like to be picked up for my return ride at
(time) _____.

My cellphone number is 123-444-5555.

Published Quarterly by
Community Skills Program®

BrainWaves is a joint project of the clients and
staff of the Community Skills Program® of
Counseling and Rehabilitation, Inc. and
Counseling and Rehabilitation of New Jersey, Inc.

Editor: Sally Kneipp, Ph.D., LPC, LRC, CRC, ABVE
Publication Assistant: Lisa Sechrist

BrainWaves is free of charge.
It is available by mail or online by accessing our
website at www.communityskillsprogram.com.

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