



TBI News & Views

A publication of the Northern New Jersey Traumatic Brain Injury System

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Younger Brother Contributes Invaluable Resource to TBI Community

By Paige Rusnock

At the age of eight, Jacob George suffered a severe, traumatic brain injury (TBI) that left him unable to communicate. His resilient parents, Jaya George and George Avirappattu, immediately adapted to the family's new circumstances while also raising their four-year-old son Daniel.

Looking back, Jaya and George remembered vividly how Daniel, who read books and watched TV with his brother, brought great joy to Jacob during their time together. Now a senior in high school, Daniel had become more involved in his brother's care and the search for treatments. Indeed, the family spent many nights searching the internet to find any bit of information that might help with Jacob's recovery.

One night, Daniel looked at the breadth of work his family had completed over the years and thought, "This would be so much easier for others if one person could compile this

information and share it somehow." In that moment, the idea of his "Service Provider Map" was born.

He saw how busy his parents were and knew other caregivers were experiencing the same thing. "I wanted to provide a gateway for TBI patients and families to easily get the resources they needed," Daniel said.

Finding an organization to partner with was the first step. "I knew the best way to get the map out there was to work with an established organization. The Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey (BIANJ) had helped my family out so much, so I wanted to help them too," Daniel explained. Once the organization joined in, he then needed to find a way to gather the information in one location.

Since he was adept in data science and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) programming, Daniel used his skills to create an application that allowed users



to search for brain injury doctors, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and more. After spending a month working on the project, it was ready to go public.

The Service Provider Map is now live on the BIANJ website so patients and families will be able to spend more time working on their recovery and less on the never-ending search for providers. Currently, the map covers only the state of New Jersey. "I want to expand the map first by adding more conditions such as blindness, deafness, and other physical impairments," said Daniel.

When asked what message he hopes his story will tell, he answered, "I want to show that the brain injury community is strong. We'll stick together and work hard for each other and the betterment of everyone in the community."

Daniel did just that. He created the Service Provider Map not only as a gift to his family but as a gift to the entire brain injury community. ■

View the Service Provider Map



RESOURCE REFRESH

PINK CONCUSSIONS



'PINK Concussions' Focuses on Essentials of Female Brain Injury

By Jeannie Lengenfelder, PhD

We often associate the color pink with love, warmth, and femininity. So it won't surprise you to learn the nonprofit group PINK Concussions brings a lot of heart and compassion to its medical care on behalf of women and girls with brain injury.

While employed as a social worker, Katherine Snedaker, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, began to question the differences in how boys and girls recovered from concussions. In 2013, Katherine founded PINK Concussions as a resource to improve the research, medical care, and community support for females with brain injury, including concussion. Her website quotes Katherine as saying, "I believe females with brain injuries ARE the invisible patients within 'the invisible injury.'"

With the tremendous success, growth, and interest in female brain injury, PINK Concussions was established as a nonprofit organization in 2015. Today, PINK Concussions focuses on both pre-injury education and post-injury medical care for women and girls with brain injury, concentrating on concussions in females sustained from sports, violence, accidents, or military service. The group promotes female brain injury research through conferences, research papers, and presentations including 11 international summits.

For example, some of the research on sports injuries suggests female athletes are not only more likely than men to sustain a concussion, but they tend to have more severe symptoms and take longer to recover. Research on brain injury following domestic violence has been challenging to conduct, but reports of domestic violence survivors being hit on the head, choked, or strangled are sobering. Repetitive head injuries and strangulation can lead to cognitive and behavioral difficulties including problems with memory, concentration, vision, hearing, and balance as well as depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

Meanwhile, Pink Concussions started a Partner-Inflicted Brain Injury Task Force in 2019 to identify professionals with expertise in brain injury and those who work in domestic violence and intimate partner violence. PINK Concussions also recruits for brain banks in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. and plans to add more in the future to form a global brain bank network committed to providing women with the same research access as men.

To continue to support awareness, PINK Concussions maintains a YouTube channel where Katherine has hosted more than 50 interviews with experts in the field in a series called *Casual Conversations with Brain Injury Professionals*. PINK Concussions also promotes personal stories from ambassadors about their brain injury experiences and highlights more than 50 PINK Concussions intern presentations that were shared with school nurses, parents/caregivers, college athletic staff, veterans, teenage girls, medical professionals, and researchers. In addition, the nonprofit oversees 14 online support groups with more than 8,000 members on a variety of topics.

To learn more about PINK Concussions, about pledging your postmortem brain, or to join one of its support groups, visit pinkconcussions.com. ■



"If brain injury is the "invisible illness" of our time, then within this invisible injury, women have been the invisible patients. Over the past decade, we have been able to raise general awareness of brain injuries in women athletes and veterans. With the #PINKBrainPledge, we've recruited hundreds of women to pledge their brains to research projects and brain banks. Now it is time to redouble our efforts to recruit women across the world, as well as promote equal funding and efforts for brain injury research in women."

- Katherine Snedaker, Founder and Executive Director of PINK Concussions

EXPERT OUTLOOK

Improving Your Memory with Dr. Sarah A. Raskin

By Erica Weber, PhD



Sarah A. Raskin, PhD

There are many reasons we forget things. Sarah A. Raskin, PhD has spent her career figuring out why people forget and what we can do about it.

Dr. Raskin is the Charles A. Dana Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Trinity College in Hartford, CT, where she conducts research on improving prospective memory (or “remembering to remember”) in people with brain injuries. As a board-certified neuropsychologist who specializes in rehabilitation, her research and clinical work are focused on assisting people to find strategies that help them remember to perform their daily tasks.

This summer Dr. Raskin shared memory and brain health strategies in a virtual webinar* entitled “Managing Your Memory.” Her presentation explored the different types of memory tasks people face in their everyday lives and provided helpful strategies for successful remembering. Some of her more salient points included:



External and environmental memory strategies: There are many devices that help support your memory, ranging from basic and low-tech (like notebooks and paper calendars) to customizable, high-tech options (like smartphones and tablet apps). You must use these strategies consistently so they become part of your everyday routine. Put these items in a highly visible area so you can easily find them.



Internal strategies: Mnemonic devices, like using an acronym, are helpful to organize the way you add information to memory or your brain. One example, is recalling the letters “PEMDAS” for the mathematical order of operations (e.g., Parentheses; Exponents; Multiplication and Division; Addition and Subtraction). Visualizing the information you want to remember can help form a more robust memory.



Spaced practice: When and how often you practice remembering can have a big impact on how well you remember information. Spaced practice over a longer period (as opposed to “cramming”) improves the encoding of information and helps in recalling it when needed.

Finally, Dr. Raskin stressed that overall healthy living is important to support your brain health and memory function. This includes getting adequate sleep, eating a healthy diet, and getting regular exercise. If it’s good for your body, it’s good for your brain! ■

*“Managing Your Memory,” was presented as part of a speaker series on August 1, 2022. This series is supported by Kessler Foundation, the Northern New Jersey Traumatic Brain Injury System, and by a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), Grant #90DPTB0003.



To learn more about this important topic, you can access the full lecture on the Kessler Foundation YouTube page

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TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY FACT SHEETS

The Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center summarizes cognitive problems that can occur after TBI in their fact sheet. This can be found by scanning the QR code on the right.



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