



TBI Community News

REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER ON COMMUNITY INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AT TIRR

Center for Creative Expression

by Karen A. Hart, Ph.D.

The ability to work, love and play are some of the ways in which people give meaning to their lives. Play involves not only leisure and recreational activities, but also creativity. Expressing creativity through the arts can be more important if you no longer find meaning through your work or relationships.

The Center for Creative Expression is a project of our Rehabilitation Research and Training Center that brings together artists and individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI) in classes at various locations throughout the community. The Orange Show Center for Visionary Art of Houston works with us to identify artists who serve as teachers of creative arts such as dance, drawing, painting, sculpting, and theater. The Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center and The Arts Alliance Center at Clear Lake have partnered with us to provide locations for the classes that are easily accessible from the community.

The purposes of the project are to demonstrate that:

1. A center for creative expression program can be developed and used in other communities as a model,
2. Community artists can feel comfortable making adjustments for persons with TBI to become involved in learning their art,
3. People with TBI will join a program offering classes for creative expression,
4. A program of creative expression adds meaning and increases life satisfaction in the lives of people with TBI who participate, and
5. Participation in a program that provides the chance for creative expression can have an impact on social isolation and emotional issues among persons with TBI.

Classes are held every other week for three months and three classes are held during each three-month period. So far we have had classes on creative writing, poetry, dance, mosaics, drums, piñata making, drawing and acting. The class topics are decided by our advisory group based on suggestions from potential and current students with TBI living in the community. When the topics, days and times are determined, the Orange Show offers the opportunity to their art teachers. A TIRR therapist also comes to the classes to



Long Chu, center, instructor for the Creative Writing class with his students



Jason and Susannah Ferguson

help the teacher learn about TBI.

Since this is a demonstration project, we are looking at what times of day and days of the week seem to work best. We also follow up with students who miss class to find out if there are any barriers to attending class such as transportation, parking or other issues. The biggest barrier so far seems to be the heavy rains that Houston experienced earlier this year in which people hesitated to drive except when absolutely necessary. We are also keeping track of what the students, teachers and therapists experience from being in the classes and whether they recommend changes for future sessions. Most fun have been the celebration parties that serve as a “recital” or “art showing” as well as a celebration of the accomplishment at the end of each three-month session. This celebration includes potential new students as well as families, class participants, teachers, TIRR therapists and the RRTC staff.

This issue of the TBI Community newsletter includes creative works by several of our students for you to enjoy. You can find out when our next classes begin by logging on to the Internet at www.tbicommunity.org or by contacting Terri Hudler-Hull at 713-797-5971 or emailing her at hullt@tirr.tmc.edu. ■

Dance to the Music

I have been teaching the Dance from Within class for the past 2 sessions. Throughout those approximately 32 weeks, my Tuesday night class was always something I looked forward to. Even though I would have a lesson plan for every class, we never knew exactly what was going to happen! My favorite times were getting to know each participant through the "Photo Story" project. This experience involved each participant bringing a photo to class of a happy memory and all of us reenacting the memory through a play that we created. I enjoyed walking down memory lane with:

- Kevyn as he met Marvin Zindler!
- Laurie as she competed in Country Western dancing!
- Alex and his wife, Francis, as they danced at his 80th birthday party!
- Jojo and Shauna on their hay ride at camp!
- Nova as she and her friends toured the Hill Country!
- Debra as she Jazzcised for a photograph in a Houston health magazine!
- Theresa as she water skied!
- Brenda as she stood up for her sister's wedding!
- Julie while she was cheering as a cheerleader at a basketball game!
- Laurachell as she decorated the Christmas tree!

Thanks for the Memories!!!

Tina Sabuco, Instructor
"Dance from Within"

Insights from an Instructor

Just when I thought a decade of teaching art had provided me with a full range of experiences, I was presented with the opportunity to teach a painting class for the TIRR program. Upon the first class, my attention began to shift and a clearer view was offered to the deep and sometimes painful insight into the issues facing adults who have trau-

matic brain injury. Never have I been around a group of people more resilient or positive. There was both pleasure and pain associated with having to learn something completely new along with the need to relearn old familiar skills. At last, the art school dynamic had changed, jealousy and pride were now substituted with genuine altruism coupled with a patience that translated to all aspects of the students' lives. Our time together impressed upon me the importance of developing patience in generating a positive, peaceful and healthy mind. So in the end, much to my surprise, painting became secondary and the peacefulness that my students taught me made life seem more attractive and colorful.

Karen Justice, Instructor
Painting

The Creative Writing Class

When I was asked what kind of class that I thought would be beneficial and interesting for brain injury survivors, I thought of writing. For me it was an outlet. When I couldn't talk or talk very good writing is how I expressed myself. When the class started, I found out that our teacher, Long Chu, was a poet. That is what I love to write. I also found out that he was part of Writers in the Schools. Not only a part of it, but the Associate Director – was I impressed. Long taught us numerous things about poetry and writing in



Students working on projects in the painting class



Having a great time with costumes in the Creative Movement Class

general. My writing quickly improved. I learned that details separate a poet from an author, and how to write about different topics than just my injury. I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to attend such a wonderful class with such wonderful people in the class. I really looked forward to going to this class, and I am sad that it is over. Thank you Long for teaching the class, and thank you Terri for making it happen.

Jason Ferguson, student
Creative Writing

A Student's Perspective

My name is Debbie Pillow. I just finished taking the painting class offered by the Center for Creative Expression for Persons with traumatic brain injuries (TBI), that TIRR have put together. My instructor was Karen and she was such a sweet, caring, fun, and excellent art teacher. I learned a lot from her class. She taught me to paint still life art with and without using a pencil, which is very hard to do, especially if you have never taken any drawing class before. With Karen's gentle persuasion and her confidence in me I ended up doing it!

Also I loved looking at Karen's box of laminated postcards of famous artist paintings. They showed me how many styles of art that are out in the art

world. Part of our assignment was to pick out the art cards and incorporate them in our background of our painting. That was so cool and I have never thought about doing that with my art before!!

Another great event happened the last day of class, which happened to be the day after getting discharged from the hospital. There was only Karen, Terri Hull, Wendy (my life time partner), and me there. Karen got out my last painting that only had a very rough sketch of three pieces of pottery on it. I went through the box of famous art cards and found a picture for my background. Then with everybody's encouragement they convinced me, that I could finish this painting in six days at home. So I took on the challenge with a box of paints and brushes, that TIRR let me borrow. I completed the painting in five days! This was the first painting that I have ever done by myself and at home!! I have a dresser full of art supplies that family and friends have given me, so I could do my art but I never have used any of it yet. Due to this home project that I enjoyed so much doing at home and with the encouragement of Karen, Terri, and Wendy, I think I will start doing painting at home!!

At the open house for the creative expressions for persons with TBI, I brought two mosaics. I learned how to do these mosaics in the first round of classes that TIRR offered for people with TBI. I did these mosaics all by myself at home using the knowledge and encouragement of my many



Learning new dance steps in the Creative Movement and Dance from Within Classes



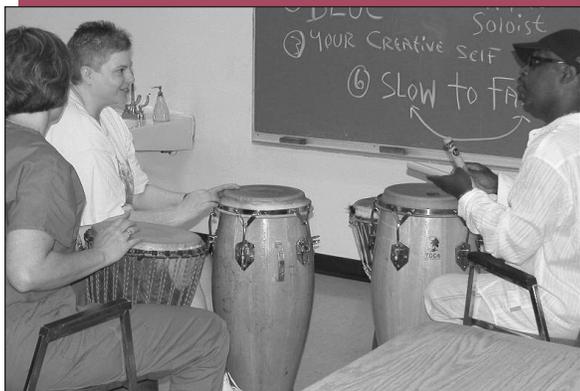
instructors that I had from the mosaic class. I loved doing mosaics!! I especially liked when we got to put on our safety gear and cover the plate or tiles with a towel and hammer it into pieces. It is a great way to relieve tension, stress, and it was just plain fun to do! We learned to put the pieces on garden pots or randomly place on floor tiles. I really enjoyed when we started to design pictures with the colorful broken tile and plate pieces!!

I want to thank TIRR and their wonder staff and teachers for offering and teaching these classes. They are helping me to practice my socialization, meeting new people, and making new friends. The classes are also giving me a reason to get out of bed, to take a shower, to get out of my house, and to give me something to look forward to. Also, they help me to exercise my mind, and help my hand and eye coordination. The best part of the classes are helping me to learn new ways to

express my art, and after all that it is said and done it is just a whole allot of fun!!!!

*Debbie Pillow, student
Creative Writing,
Painting, Mosaics
and Drums*

*Nora Sbrucsh, Debbie
Pillow with Drum
instructor, Robert Smalls*



Long Days

Every other Tuesday is a day I really look forward to. These are Long Days. New friends have made. The class room is where we meet to learn and express ourselves through our pen. One way to bring out the beauty within; our teacher took on a task without knowing what he was getting into. His heart of gold led him to us and I am thankful for that. He turns Greek salad into English peas. Expanding our minds with readings of great poets and authors that write in different styles to inspire and teach us. Learning first hand that brain injury affects more than just the brain. Being there every week for us, patient, smiling, quick to pass a kind word. "I can't write that well" someone says. He is quick to turn the tables and show them how they can write well and express themselves. These are the Long days that I enjoy. Only for an hour (or 55 minutes depending on what clock you are reading) there is a bond that can't be broken, brain injury, writing not spoken.

Peace

*Written by Jason Ferguson to honor
his Creative Writing instructor,
Long Chu.*

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The Moon

Moon, moon, you come out at night, sometimes very bright—what a hell of a sight. You come out full sometimes, sometimes half; when you come out bright you are the sun of the night. When you don't shine or are covered up by dark clouds we still know it's another night. So I'll see you tonight.

By David Ferrer
Creative Writing

Hands Across America

My hands are an extension of my personality. They are very important to me. Everyone always comments on my polished nails. I usually try to color coordinate my outfit and nails.

I think of my hands as being important because I lost use of my arms and hands after the accident. My hands were clenched into fists; they

were so tight my nails would cut into my palms. I had to use cones to help straighten my fingers. The pain of my hands was so intense.

I'm so grateful to God for seeing me through everything. Thank God I made it through years of therapy. I'm glad that it's in the past.

By Julie Cervantes
Creative Writing

April Anticipation

Crocuses poking through a late winter snow. Daffodils too. The air is so cool and crisp. Walking is a joy, especially by the river. You see so much. The grass is beginning to grow tiny shoots. This is bike riding weather, the cold air hitting your face. It's so refreshing! It's a month of hope and new beginnings in Massachusetts.

By Debra Peskin
Creative Writing



Brain Injury Association of Texas 23rd Annual State Conference

The Annual BIA Texas conference will be held **August 20-21, 2005** at the **Holiday Inn Select-Airport in San Antonio, Texas.**

Stay tuned for more information. Dates and Location to be determined.

For up-to-date Information please go to the BIA-TX web site at: <http://www.biatx.org/> or call: 1-800-392-0040

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